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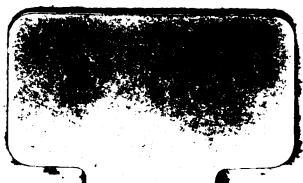
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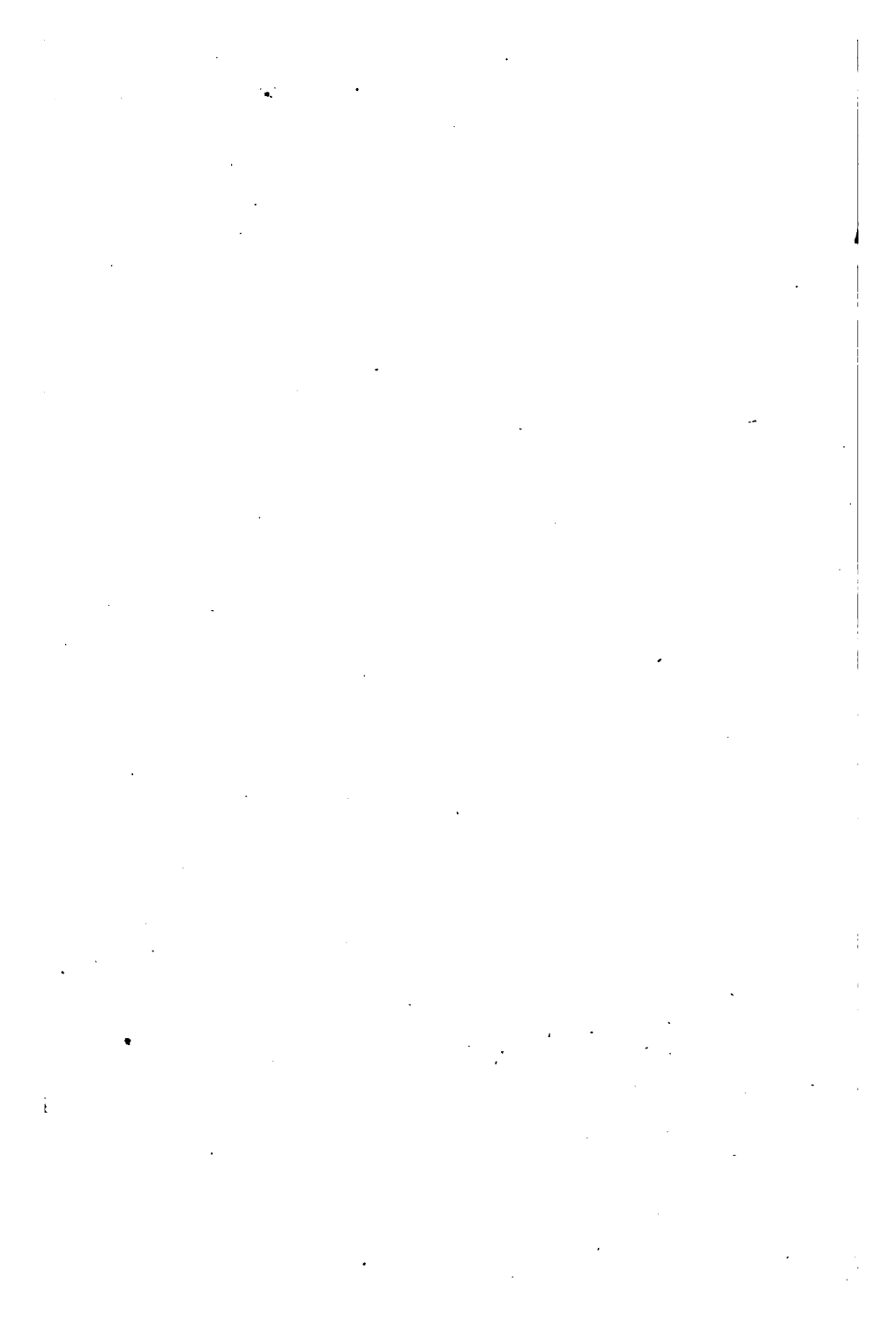
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YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

VOL. II.

[illegible]

YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

A NOVEL.

BY

DUTTON COOK,

Author of "Hobson's Choice," "Over Head and Bars," "Paul Foster's Daughter," etc.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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Inscribed
to
Linda.

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YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

CHAPTER I.

A LAWYER'S OFFICE.

NOT that my dinner was by any means a good one ; it was, indeed, detestable : raw, greasy, gristly, and half cold. But I was very hungry. On the journey my appetite had lain in abeyance ; I had scarcely touched the abundant packet of provisions my mother had supplied me with. I had only applied to my flask once, when the dust of the road had become unendurably choking. But I was now prepared to devour almost anything ; which was fortunate, as it happened. I even emptied a small decanter of sherry, a curious compound, in which fire and acidity struggled for ascendancy, both, with good reason, claiming the victory. The pimpled waiter eyed me inquiringly,

but rather with amused contempt than with genuine sympathy, I suspect, as I drained my glass. Possibly he was expecting me to fall mortally stricken by the unwholesome draught, and desired to witness that catastrophe. I survived, however. I was a "regular yokel." And I had the supreme digestive powers of youth.

The "boots" of the Golden Cross, upon my summons, relieved me of my boots, chalking the number of my room upon their solid soles, and equipped me with slippers of enormous dimensions. It was a gymnastic and terpsichorean feat, mounting the stairs to bed and retaining these vast receptacles upon my feet. Often I was wrecked from them, as it were, and had much difficulty in getting aboard them again. While I was thus engaged I encountered a laughing chambermaid. It was to conceal her mirthfulness, perhaps, that she proffered me "a pan of coals" for my bed. I declined the proposition, but vaguely comprehending it.

I slept very soundly, losing consciousness almost immediately after I had extinguished my candle and groped my way to my mausoleum of a bedstead. It creaked and groaned ominously as I entered it. Then I sunk deep into a feather bed,

as into a mound of newly-turned earth. A sense of dampness, a smell of mouldiness, a feeling that the sheets were of an unaccustomed material and texture, and then—I was asleep.

I awoke early. There was much noise. The rattle and patter of harness and hoofs, the hissing of ostlers, the thunderous rumbling of an early coach passing beneath the archway of the inn, a babel of voices. It was daylight. I tried to open the window, but it resisted all my efforts. I doubt if it ever had been, or could be, opened.

After breakfast, under the supervision of the pimpled waiter, who looked more pimpled than ever by daylight, perhaps owing to his very sallow complexion, I sallied forth. The waiter had besought me to order dinner, but I declined to commit myself to that proceeding. He was not very civil. And washing would no doubt have benefited his appearance. And if he had brushed his threadbare black coat he would perhaps have looked rather more tidy, or less slovenly.

I bought a map of London, and felt then fortified on the subject of losing my way, or incurring danger, possibly suffering death even for mysterious surgical purposes. I had been much exercised for some time past by considerations of that sort.

And I had my hair cut. I had observed that my locks were longer and more straggling than appeared to be the fashion of town.

"From the country, sir, I should say?" remarked the hairdresser. "I thought so. They've always such a knife-and-fork way of cutting 'air in the country. I can always tell by a gent's 'ead where he's 'ad his 'air cut. You'll excuse me, sir. We'll soon get it in nice order for you. Wonderful thick your hair grows to be sure, sir. But it's too dry. Likely to come off in patches by 'andfuls, I should say, before long. Dear me! They must have cut it with a chopper or a sickle where you come from, sir."

I blushed. The Purrington barber was rather a rude practitioner. Besides operating on human hair, he was in the habit of clipping horses; at times, even, of trimming and shearing sheep. But I came to the conclusion that the Londoners were not very respectful, and were unpleasantly inclined to personal criticism.

I felt, however, that I left the hairdresser's hand with a smartened aspect. I wished all the same that the pomatum with which he had anointed me had been less powerfully odorous. Throughout the day I was conscious, especially whenever I re-

moved my hat, of a sort of atmosphere of greasy scent attending me whithersoever I went. I was inconvenienced, moreover, by the weight in my pocket of a heavy jar of the same unguent, of which I had become possessed upon the urgent invitation of the hairdresser. He had besought me, indeed, to expend quite a small fortune in the acquirement of a selection from his wares. I had evaded his solicitations, I thought, rather cleverly by saying that I would try the pomatum first, and if I found that fulfil his account of it, I would certainly return to make further purchases. He could hardly contest this view of the case, without manifesting inconvenient distrust of the virtues of the commodity he had so commended to my notice.

With some difficulty I found my way to Golden-square. Mr. Monck's house had but a side view of the enclosure, and could only by courtesy be described as pertaining to the quadrangle. On this account, perhaps, the letter *A* was added to its number, proclaiming it an appendage in the nature of a redundancy. The name of "Monck" was inscribed in large letters upon a tarnished door-plate. A smaller plate fixed above a bell-handle in the door-post bore the word "Office." The house was of considerable size, and boasted a certain

respectability of aspect, in spite of its exceeding dinginess. It seemed encrusted with soot, its window-panes clouded with dust, its iron railings rusty, its woodwork almost bare of paint. The door was spotted with blisters, and was shedding its outer skin in strips and patches. I pulled the bell. The knocker I found to be secured by an iron staple. There was the clicking sound of wirework moved by a sluggish spring, and then, the door swung slowly open by invisible agency. I stood alone in a narrow feebly-lighted hall or passage. Then I observed, in large letters upon a black board nailed against the wall, "Please to shut the door." I obeyed this direction.

After a moment's hesitation I proceeded along the passage, and, passing two doors, each marked "Private," arrived at a third, bearing upon it the word "Office." I knocked.

"Come in," cried a loud voice.

I entered a spacious room built out at the back of the house, and lighted by a skylight.

"Is Mr. Monck in?" I inquired.

There was but one person in the room, an elderly man, with iron-grey hair, combed into a peak on the top of his forehead, and projecting thence like the horn of a unicorn. He was sitting on a high stool,

writing at a desk with brass rods rising above it, for the support of books and papers. He thus surveyed me through a frame, as it were, or from a window.

"In one moment," he said. And he continued to write.

I glanced round the room. It was very bare of furniture, and the ceiling was black with smoke. A little stove stood in one corner, with a long funnel springing from it, taking zigzag forms, and then suddenly darting through the wall. The uncarpeted floor was much blotched with ink, and very gritty to walk upon. I have known smoother gravel paths. There were other desks and stools, a pile of tin boxes, a deal press, with pigeon-holes and shelves, crowded with discoloured papers and books, and an iron safe, painted green, with a brass handle. Tattered, fly-spotted almanacks, notices, and lists hung awry upon the grimy walls. Near the stove was an engraved portrait, in a black frame, of a judge in his wig and robes, but the glass was so dimmed and dusty I could scarcely trace out the design. Suddenly I observed that, while I was taking note of the room and its contents, the man at the desk had ceased to write, and was eyeing me intently. He then solemnly and deliberately took a pinch of snuff from a tin box.

"You wish to see Mr. Monck?"

"Yes."

"Particularly?"

"Well, yes, I may say particularly."

"He's engaged at present."

"Will he be disengaged shortly?"

He looked at a large thick silver watch, extracted from his fob by a steel chain with much effort.

"I can't say I think he'll be disengaged very shortly."

"Had I better call again, or shall I wait?"

He climbed down from his high stool slowly and laboriously, with something of the action of a bear descending its pole, and approached me.

I then perceived that he was of very low stature, and that this was mainly due to the disproportion of his lower limbs. His shoulders were broad and high, his head large, and his arms unusually lengthy, but his legs were so short and unsubstantial that they seemed to be a sort of misfit, and to be at discord with his other members. He shuffled somewhat as he walked, craning his head and bowing outwards his back. He had hard aquiline features, a deeply-lined face, a snuff-stained upper lip, and thick bristling eyebrows, beneath which his

sharp grey eyes glittered shrewdly. He spoke with an air of watchful cunning and suspicion, but his manner otherwise was not discourteous. He wore a threadbare olive-green coat, long in the tails and sleeves, and high in the collar, buttoned across his chest; a brooch adorned his rather soiled shirt-front, and a black silk cravat was loosely wound round his neck. He dispensed with shirt-collars. He carried his tin snuff-box in one hand and held streaming from the other a stringy, faded, yellow silk handkerchief.

"Mr. Monck is engaged," he said. "But perhaps I may be able to do as well. May I ask your business?"

"My name is Nightingale," I began. A curious smile seemed to star his face all over with dints and wrinkles.

"Precisely," he interrupted. "I thought it might be Mr. Nightingale. Take a seat, please." He handed me a battered, wooden-seated chair. "I hope you find yourself quite well, Mr. Nightingale, and have recovered from the fatigues of your journey. From Purrington, I think? I'm from that part of the country myself. I thought, from your way of speaking, if I may be permitted to say so, that you might be young Mr. Nightingale of

Purrington. Precisely. We have been expecting you, Mr. Nightingale."

"You know Purrington, Mr. ——"

"Vickery, my name is—Mr. Monck's manager. Yes, I know Purrington, but not very well. I was not born there, though not very far from it. I've not been there for many years. But I may say I know Purrington. Lord Overbury has a place there, I think? Precisely. Yes, Overbury Hall. Glad to see you in London, Mr. Nightingale. We'll make you as comfortable as we can. There's no necessity whatever for your troubling yourself about seeing Mr. Monck. We were expecting you. All arrangements have been duly made and settled. And you left your uncle, Mr. Orme, I think, quite well? Precisely."

There was something cat-like, it seemed to me, in his way of eyeing me from under the shadow of his bristling brows. He appeared to watch the effect upon me of all he said, and to be not less heedful as to the nature of his utterances. He was friendly and polite after an old-world fashion, yet there was an air about him of suspicion and craftiness, and almost of mystery. I attributed this to his calling. Connected with the law, doubtless, for many years, he had become the depository of secrets

without number, and was bound to maintain strict guard over himself. In the same way he had acquired distrust of others—was influenced by a perpetual fear lest he should be over-reached, and his hidden knowledge brought to light by some adroit manœuvre on the part of his interlocutors. But if he disclosed little he was bent upon learning much. By his ingenious system of questioning me, and of risking statements, and then, finding himself uncontradicted, assuming them to be facts, and treating them as a basis upon which to found further inquiries, he soon possessed himself of all I had to tell, and had arrived at distinct conclusions as to my character and intentions, and generally as to the condition and views of my relatives. Upon my entrance he had affected to be much occupied, but he made no attempt to resume the labours I had seemed to disturb. He stood beside me chatting, as though he had ample time to spare, taking snuff freely, and busily flourishing his handkerchief.

“A wonderful study the law, Mr. Nightingale, as you’ll find out for yourself very shortly. Arduous, no doubt, and intricate, and dry—so I’ve heard people say, but that is not my experience. You’re not much acquainted with the subject, yet? No. So I had judged. Not read a single law book, I

dare say. No. It was not to be expected. You're young, you see, and, as you have said, brought up alone in the country—in a solitary farm-house. Precisely. You were not likely to make the science of law one of your studies. Of course not. But you've done well to come direct to London, the head-quarters of law. I am not myself a solicitor; as I said, name of Vickery, Mr. Monck's managing clerk—I pretend to be nothing more—and I wouldn't be thought wanting in respect to country practitioners—very excellent men, many of them, no doubt—but their offices are not a good school. The cream of their business comes to London. Conveyancing they have, of a sort, and assize business, vestry meetings, turnpike trusts, and so on. A confined sphere of action. You were quite right to come to town direct. Your uncle, Mr. Orme—I know the name—was an early friend of Mr. Monck's? Knew him intimately, at one time, I think you said?"

I explained that so far as I was informed my uncle had known Mr. Monck well in times past, how intimately I could not say, but certainly that they had not met for very many years.

"Precisely," Mr. Vickery went on. "That was how I understood the matter. No. They have not

met for very many years ; of course not. Mr. Orme has had little occasion, happily, for legal assistance. Rarely visits London, probably ? Mr. Monck rarely quits it, he is so much engaged. I will see that you are made comfortable here, Mr. Nightingale, and are put into the right way. As Mr. Monck's manager, he being so much engaged, that duty usually devolves upon me. We will have that desk in the corner cleared out for you, Mr. Nightingale ; you'll be snug there, out of the draught of the door. You'll soon feel yourself at home. Precisely. All does seem very strange at first. And you're new to London ? Your first visit ? So I had judged. And you are staying at——”

“ At the Golden Cross.”

“ At the Golden Cross. You'll be glad, no doubt, to move from there as soon as possible. You will take lodgings ?”

I said that it was upon that subject I had been enjoined to seek Mr. Monck's counsel.

“ Precisely,” said Mr. Vickery. Then, after a pause, he resumed : “ But perhaps it's hardly necessary to trouble Mr. Monck upon such a matter. Lodgings are easily met with, of all sorts, at all prices. You would wish to be moderate in your expenditure ? Precisely. One gentleman articulated

here, some years ago now, lived at Islington, but that's rather distant; another, I remember, lodged in Featherstone-buildings, Holborn. That might do, Mr. Nightingale, if you're really without choice. Featherstone-buildings, a central situation, quiet, respectable, comfortable, and not too expensive. I think you might find Featherstone-buildings suit you."

I said I thought so too; never having heard of the place before.

"If it doesn't suit, you can easily change; a week's notice is all that's required. You'll be glad to see about the matter at once, perhaps? Precisely. And as you're new to London, you may care to look about you a little before taking your seat here. There's much to see in London—especially to a young gentleman visiting town for the first time—very much to see. I am sure of Mr. Monck's concurrence when I say that there need be no hurry about your setting to work in the office. You've five years before you, you know. A day or two is no great matter. You're going? Good morning, Mr. Nightingale. Happy to make your acquaintance. And, if you should happen to be writing home, I am sure you may present Mr. Monck's best remembrances to your uncle, Mr. Orme; say, in-

deed, anything becoming and respectful of that sort that may occur to you. Good morning!"

So I left Mr. Vickery, taking snuff with great composure. Long after I had quitted Golden-square, I seemed to feel his scrutinising, suspicious eyes fixed upon me with curious intentness.

CHAPTER II.

AN ARTICLED CLERK.

AIDED by my map I soon found my way to Featherstone-buildings—a sort of isthmus connecting the thoroughfares of Holborn and Bedford-row—and there secured furnished apartments on the second floor of a house on the western side of the narrow street. They were rather dark rooms, and to me, accustomed to open spaces, seemed very confined in the matter of outlook; the opposite houses were so strangely near, and their tenants able in such wise to inspect all my proceedings so closely, that I appeared almost to be living in public. But I overcame this feeling in time, and soon found myself staring at my neighbours, with the same sort of cold complacency and idle interest they manifested in surveying me. The street was removed from the roar of Holborn, and was seldom traversed by other than foot passengers. It was, therefore,

tolerably quiet, though disturbed at intervals by the shrill cries and strange noises of itinerant traders and musicians. These amused me at first by their novelty; but they soon wearied me, and it was long before I became sufficiently habituated to them to regard them with indifference. Even now I remember with a shudder the screaming voice of one woman in particular, who sold water-cresses and bought hareskins, and incessantly paced the street; while a man in a dirty Highland dress, with tawny legs, who played the bagpipes twice a week just below my window, I still look back upon as one of the sworn tormentors of my early life in London.

The rooms were furnished with a sort of tidy shabbiness. They were clean after a fashion, but they had clearly known nothing of re-decoration for many years. The pattern of the carpet seemed to have been fairly swept off it, exposing a surface of discoloured threads; the chintz that curtained the windows and covered the chairs was limp of texture and faded of hue; the paint was dull and rubbed away at all sharp corners; the quicksilver was vanishing from the looking-glass, and its frame retained only a very few streaks and patches of gilding. Still I was in the mood to be satisfied with everything, and I assured myself I should be

very comfortable in Featherstone-buildings. When I had removed my luggage from the Golden Cross—after rewarding the pimpled waiter with absurd lavishness for services he had not rendered, by no means winning his esteem thereby, or changing his scornful view of me as a “regular yokel”—when I had arranged my little stock of books and ornamented the mantelpiece and walls with a few of my drawings, including, of course, sketches of the Down Farm and Purrington Church, I felt that my rooms had really a very cosy and agreeable young-bachelor sort of look. And it was pleasant to think of them as *my* rooms—my own peculiar rooms absolutely, so long, of course, as I paid rent for them and received no notice to quit from my landlady—a civil-spoken, attentive woman, she appeared to be, with yet that look of shrewd suspicion in her face which I began to think was an inevitable characteristic of Londoners. Her husband, she informed me, was “cutter out” at a fashionable tailor’s at the West-end of the town—Stultz, I think the name was—and an excellent workman “when he ’ad his ’ealth,” which I subsequently discovered to mean, when he was sober. She intrusted me with the key of the street-door—a precious symbol of independence I accounted it—

and expressed a hope, certainly superfluous, that I should be "steady."

I made up my mind that Featherstone-buildings was just the place for me—that I had been, indeed, fortunate in obtaining Mr. Vickery's advice—in the absence of Mr. Monck—and at once securing such admirable lodgings. I looked forward to the industrious pursuit of my law studies, so soon as I should have procured certain indispensable books, with intervals devoted, by way of relief, to general literature and the fine arts. I pictured to myself long winter evenings passed in my easy-chair in such commendable occupations. It will be seen that my aspirations, if of a simple, were of a worthy kind. I discovered with some disappointment, however, that my easy-chair was less easy than it looked. It had seen much service; had been occupied probably by many previous students, and bore their impress; was, indeed, suffering from callosities and bulges in inconvenient places that rendered it rather uncomfortable than otherwise. The sofa was in rather worse case. It was prickly from the tattered state of its horse-hair hide; sharp points made their way easily through the thin chintz cover with a most irritating effect. I philosophically decided, however, that these minor grievances

must be borne uncomplainingly. I could not expect to have everything to my mind. I was paying but a moderate rent, though I ascertained afterwards that it was much in excess of the amount paid by any previous tenant of the apartments.

I wrote a long letter to my mother informing her of all my proceedings and adventures in town, so far.

I then bettered my acquaintance with London, its ceaseless turmoil, its interminable streets, its brilliant shops, its glare of gas, its buildings, crowds, and most wondrous life. How different to Steepleborough! Why, it was that cathedral town, which I had once imagined to be rather an important and impressive place, magnified and multiplied again and again till all powers of reckoning were completely distanced. For hours I was content simply to wander about gazing, and doubtless gaping, as I went. I took my precious map with me as a sort of sheet-anchor, and kept a watchful eye, lest I should be relieved, by sharpers or pickpockets, of such property as I carried with me. I had read of the cunning misdeeds of those desperadoes. And I avoided deserted or murky districts—for stories had reached my ear of the entrapping of innocent country folk, and their disappearance from mortal ken for ever

afterwards. I visited St. Paul's, and was lost in surprise at its marvellous magnitude; bowed reverently before the shrine of Lord Nelson; watched with interest the swaying to and fro in one of the aisles of the dusty foreign flags captured in the great war, and listened awe-struck to the reverberating thunders of the whispering-gallery. A verger of practical mind often roused me from rhapsodical musings by his iterated demands for twopence to view more and more of the curiosities of the cathedral. I think I disbursed seven twopences in all. Then I stood upon the bridges—gazing at the brown waters of the Thames, the panting steam-boats darting hither and thither, the forests of masts in the Pool. I visited Westminster Abbey, a show of wax-work, the National Gallery, an exhibition of modern pictures. I was intoxicated with sight-seeing.

I dined, in my ignorance, most expensively, at a West-end hotel. It was a day or two, I think, before I discovered, or was directed to, a most respectable establishment in Rupert-street, not far from Mr. Monck's office, where I could obtain a modest dinner upon reasonable terms.

In the evening I went to the play. I will say no more of it now than that I was amazed and

delighted beyond measure. The booth at Dripford Fair, in which I had first seen Rosetta, had insufficiently prepared me for the marvels of a great London theatre. I felt that poor Mauleverer had spoken advisedly upon the subject. I became an enthusiastic playgoer.

I increased my library by buying a second-hand copy of Blackstone's Commentaries. I looked forward to studying that famous work with lasting profit and pleasure. With a view to my greater comfort as a bachelor living alone in London, I made other purchases, including some tobacco, which did not agree with me so well as I had hoped it would. Many other investments I made at this time did not prove much more satisfactory. Still I was living and learning, although I might be diminishing my small store of money rather injudiciously.

I have mentioned Rosetta's name. In the excitement of my new experiences I had almost forgotten her. Not quite; for now and then vague memories of her recurred to me. I thought of her lamentingly, even tenderly. Yet it seemed to me that momentous events had come between us like some insuperable mountain. She pertained to a past state of things that was now very distant from me. It was as though long years had intervened between

the time when I had last seen her with her husband at Overbury Hall, and the present. I was a child then; now I was a man—almost, and she—Lady Overbury. Yet I found myself inquiring at times, though comparatively unexcited by the question, What had become of her? Should I ever see her again?

I took possession of my seat and desk in Mr. Monck's office, to commence my career as his articulated clerk. I found old Vickery at his post. He saw that I was well supplied with writing materials, and handed me a voluminous document to copy.

"We shall get on very nicely, I'm sure, Mr. Nightingale," he said. "I'm glad to see you're so punctual. I trust it may last." He said this as though he fully believed it wouldn't. "I think we had better make a practical commencement; that, I know, has always been Mr. Monck's way with young gentlemen articulated to him. I've always been in favour of practical measures myself. There's so much more to be learned in that way than from books. I've but a poor opinion of books myself. They're so confusing, I find. You needn't trouble yourself much about reading, I think." And I had been looking forward to diligent study of Blackstone! "I've not read many books myself, and

yet I may say that I know a good deal of law. I ought to—precisely—seeing how many years I’ve been Mr. Monck’s manager. I don’t pretend to be more than that, of course. This is what we call a State of Facts for the Master’s Office. It’s in Dobson versus Dicks, a Chancery suit of long standing. Let us see if you can make a nice fair copy of it. You’re not accustomed, of course, to writing what we call a law hand. Precisely. But you’ll soon get into the way of it. There’s no hurry, we’re never in a hurry in Chancery matters; only write plainly and legibly without flourishes—we don’t care about flourishes in the law—except perhaps just at the commencement of a deed at ‘This Indenture,’ or ‘Know all men by these Presents;’ then we indulge sometimes in a little ornament. And don’t make the tails of your letters too long; it spoils the look of writing, to my thinking; and don’t mind about putting in stops; we’re not paid for punctuation in the law, so naturally we do without it; we’re paid by the word, or rather by the folio, so many words to a folio, you understand. Precisely. I’m sure you’ll do your best. Now, this is the kind of writing we like. You might keep it before you as a model.” He produced a second document, an affidavit, I think it was, very

neatly written on blue foolscap paper. I recognised the penmanship at once. The formal letters received by my uncle at the Down Farm in reference to my being articulated to Mr. Monck, and signed by him, had clearly been written by the hand that had engrossed this affidavit, if affidavit it was.

"Is that your writing, Mr. Vickery?" I asked.

"No," he answered with some hesitation; "no, it's not mine. I can't write like that now; indeed, I never could, though, years ago, I could engross neatly and carefully enough. But my eyesight isn't what it was, and my hand is less steady. I'm getting old, that's what it is, Mr. Nightingale. Precisely. I call that writing really beautiful; so even, and regular, and legible; such proportion about it; each letter perfectly formed and no ragged ends, you perceive, or useless curves; all neat and simple. If you can only write like that, Mr. Nightingale, or come any way near it, you'll do. You'll become a first-rate lawyer. It wouldn't at all surprise me. With such a hand as that, a man might climb to the woolsack, even. Many Lord Chancellors I've known haven't written nearly so well."

So saying, he shuffled to his desk, leaving me to deal as best I might with the State of Facts in Dobson versus Dicks. I set manfully to work; but

I found great difficulty in cramping my hand to the legal pattern, and the State of Facts was terribly dull reading. I could make nothing of it. If it had meaning at all it was lost in involved verbosity, in labyrinthine sentences, and confused and preposterous repetitions.

Silence prevailed for some time, broken only by the asthmatic ticking of the dusty-faced office clock on a ledge above the door. Mr. Vickery was busy writing, his head bent low, so that his conical horn of iron-grey hair nearly swept his desk. He paused at intervals to reinvigorate himself with a pinch of snuff from his tin box, but he rarely looked in my direction. I grew weary; my fingers became cramped, and a strong disposition to yawn and stretch myself possessed me.

"Is Mr. Monck likely to be disengaged, do you think?" I asked presently. I had to put the question twice before I could obtain an answer.

"No," Mr. Vickery said at length, very deliberately. "Not to-day, I think. You wish to see him?"

I intimated that such was my desire.

"You've something particular to say to him, perhaps?"

"No; nothing very particular."

"Precisely. Well, he happens to be very much occupied just now ; so, as it's nothing very particular, it might perhaps stand over."

"He is in, then ?"

"Ah ! you're too sharp upon me, Mr. Nightingale. But it looks well for your success in your profession. I don't object to it. I didn't say he was in. But, as you make a point of it, and press me upon it, I don't mind admitting that he is in, but, as I said, particularly engaged. He would much rather not be troubled just now, unless it was about something very particular. But you've said it isn't that." Then, after a pause, he added : "Perhaps you thought of paying your respects to him, as his articulated clerk ? Very proper. But there's no real necessity for it. At any rate there's no hurry about it, Mr. Monck being so much occupied ; any time will do for that."

"To-morrow, perhaps ?"

"Ay, to-morrow, or the day after, or the day after that, or next week, or next month. It doesn't really press, you see. Mr. Monck is not ceremonious ; he's the last man in the world to be punctilious about trifles ; and it's but a trifle, you know, Mr. Nightingale. Not that you must think yourself neglected. Mr. Monck wouldn't wish that.

But he has full confidence in me. I have been his manager so many years. I came to this office first quite as a boy, Mr. Nightingale; in the old gentleman's time, Mr. Monck's father, I mean. He regards me quite as his *locum tenens*, as we say. You know Latin, of course. Precisely. I know a few formal terms, but not more than that. I don't pretend to, and more is not really necessary for all practical purposes; yes, as his *locum tenens*. I'll see that everything's done, that's right, Mr. Nightingale. You may trust me. Though I say it, there's no one better qualified to give a young man a practical insight into his profession. You've got hold of the right end of the stick, as the saying is, Mr. Nightingale. It will be the same with you as with the other young gentlemen who've been articled to Mr. Monck. They were all under my care, and they got on surprisingly. Knew all the courts and offices, and I may say the whole procedure of law, from a practical point of view. Any message you may have for Mr. Monck, of course I'll take care to deliver. Meanwhile, it would be as well, perhaps, not to disturb him. He doesn't like being disturbed. Few people do. That's my experience. I hope you're getting on nicely with that State of Facts. I'll come round and see presently."

I thought it strange, seeing that a considerable premium had been paid to him on his receiving me as his articted pupil, and that he had covenanted to instruct me duly in the mysteries of his craft, that Mr. Monck should be so little curious in my regard. It would have occupied little of his time, however valuable it might be, to have seen me and interchanged a few friendly words. If this was not due to me on my own account, I thought it due to my relationship to his former friend, my uncle. But my opinion was not very clearly defined on the subject—all was so new to me. For aught I knew to the contrary, this might be the ordinary practice of a lawyer's office in relation to articted clerks. Mr. Vickery had almost suggested as much.

Meantime I toiled over the State of Facts, making little progress with it. I calculated it would take me at least a week to complete the fair copy of it. It was dull work. The office hours were long in those days. We paused about five o'clock for some two hours or so, during which interval I dined in Rupert-street. Then we returned to the office as a rule, and sat at our desks until after eight o'clock. I was unaccustomed to this long confinement, and found it rather trying.

Few people ever came to the office. There

seemed no other clerk but Vickery and an errand boy, who, when unemployed out of doors, occupied his time in dusting, sorting, and tying up papers, in cleaning inkstands, spilling ink upon the floor, and blotting himself all over. He sat upon a little stool in a corner, and often, I noticed, dropped off to sleep, leaving a black impression of his head, as though it had been a lithographic stone, printed off upon the wall behind him. I asked him once why he went to sleep so often. He said he couldn't help it. He'd been up all night ; he was up most nights, helping his mother get through with her washing. He was not an interesting boy, and suffered much from an eruptive condition of the lower part of his face.

CHAPTER III.

MY PROFESSIONAL STUDIES.

DAYS passed and weeks and months ; still, according to old Vickery, Mr. Monck was always " particularly engaged and couldn't be disturbed." I had never seen him. It was certainly strange. Solicitors could not always, I thought, keep aloof from their articled clerks, and remain invisible in this way. And I was much perplexed in writing to my mother—a duty I punctually accomplished every week—how to answer her repeated inquiries concerning Mr. Monck, his treatment of me, and the degree of intimacy and friendship subsisting between us. Old Vickery tried to make me believe that there was nothing unusual in the case ; but of this I could scarcely be convinced, new as I was to London and its ways, to the law and its enigmas. And sometimes I fancied that Vickery was himself embarrassed by the matter ; weary of sustaining

a mystery that must sooner or later be dispelled.

I had entered no other room in the house except the office. Beyond Vickery and the office boy, whose name it seemed was Scoons, I had seen only a faded old woman, clothed with a sort of brown-holland cover, as though she had been an article of furniture. She usually wore a black bonnet, and appeared armed with a battered dust-pan and a stunted broom, though I could never discover that she plied those implements very effectively in the office. Her name, I gathered, was Cuppidge, or something like it. She was of a timid, humble nature, and whenever I chanced to meet her in the passage seemed seriously disconcerted, seized with a difficulty of breathing as she flattened herself painfully against the wall with an absurd anxiety to make room for me to pass—the space being always amply sufficient for that purpose, for I was of spare proportions. Or she would dart away and precipitate herself down the kitchen stairs like a scared rabbit making for its burrow. I said “good morning,” or “good evening” to her, sometimes, but beyond a convulsive gasp I obtained no response from her. I had never seen her face very distinctly, for it was always obscured by her bonnet.

Yet that there were other dwellers in the house I could not doubt. Surveyed from the outside, though it looked dingy and neglected and woe-begone enough, it wore nevertheless an inhabited air. There were faded curtains and soiled blinds in all the windows. Once I even thought I saw a shadowy face appear at one of the cloudy panes. But it was withdrawn before I could quite assure myself that it had ever been present. And as I sat at my desk I could hear footsteps on the stairs, and movements, the opening and shutting of doors, in the upper rooms. Moreover, but this was not often, visitors entered by the street door who did not approach the office, but were speedily lost in other parts of the building. Now and then I amused myself with thinking that I was the tenant, during business hours, of a haunted house; and memories of youthful adventures at the Dark Tower beguiled my toils as a copying clerk; for that and nothing more I really was at present, though I enjoyed the courtesy title of articulated pupil.

It was clear to me, too, that Vickery was a privileged person, and was entitled to enter portions of the house to which I could claim no admission. He often left the office with papers in his hand, as though to obtain advice or instructions from some

superior authority. If I was now and then tempted to think that Mr. Monck, my master, was a non-existent person, I was constrained to abandon this idea when I found that letters were frequently issued bearing a signature similar to that attached to the missives received by my uncle at the Down Farm, when first there had been question as to my adopting the law as a profession. That Mr. Monck was somewhere in the house could not be doubted therefore. Yet to all callers who inquired concerning him, Vickery had but one answer: Mr. Monck was particularly engaged, &c., followed by the suggestion that he, Vickery, was Mr. Monck's manager, and perhaps might do as well.

And then it was soon plain to me that the writer whose admirable penmanship Vickery had held up to me as an example for imitation was also resident in the house. Vickery would quit the office with draft documents to be copied; after awhile he would again retire, to return with the papers fairly written out in the same neat, regular, well-proportioned hand. Who could this writer be? I ventured upon inquiries, but I could extract no information on the subject from Vickery, and the boy Scoons, I found, knew no more than I did.

I wrote home no word of complaint; yet I found

my life most monotonously dreary. I knew no one in London, excepting only Vickery and Scoons, for I could hardly count Mrs. Cuppidge and my landlady among my acquaintances. My duties in Mr. Monck's office were simple drudgery. I found my lodgings dull and depressing. Blackstone was less interesting than I had expected him to be. I borrowed novels from a circulating library in Holborn; I sketched a little in an idle way; and I often went at half-price to the theatres. Otherwise I had few amusements, and I felt the lack of companionship considerably. Often I longed, in my dreary solitude, for the society even of Reube, or Kem, or old Truckle. I had always led rather a solitary life, but now I seemed almost desolate.

I was not invariably, however, chained throughout the day to my desk in Mr. Monck's office. Sometimes, as part of my legal education I suppose, I was taken by Vickery to "the Lane," as he called it, meaning that of Chancery, and its precincts. He exhibited to me, much bewildered the while, the various offices connected with equity and common law proceedings. They seemed to me as so many temporary coverts in which hunted clients found refuge and breathing time as they were chased and driven about by the hounds of the law.

They were never safe for long ; but still they were afforded a measure of rest and hope until renewed efforts were made for their dislodgment and further pursuit. In the end, of course, they were driven to bay, and rent in pieces, or else securely trapped by ruin in a jail. "It's a great thing to know the offices, Mr. Nightingale," Vickery stated ; "it's really practical learning. I've got them all at my fingers' ends. It's more than every man in the profession can say. Once know the offices, and you know a good deal of law, practical law, Mr. Nightingale. Precisely. That's my experience." So I was shown offices where writs were sealed, where appearances were entered, where affidavits were sworn, where deeds were enrolled, where bills were taxed ; Record offices, Masters' offices, Register offices, Accountant-Generals' offices, Lunacy Commissioners' offices, Great Seal offices, Patent offices—a most amazing catalogue. Then I was initiated into the mysteries of Judges' Chambers, a dingy row of dwarfed buildings in Rolls Gardens. Here there was a wild babel of noise from a congregation of lawyers' clerks shouting out the names of the firms they represented, or of the case they appeared in, or of the attorneys representing the other side, so that the matter in dispute might be adjusted

between them with or without reference to the judge sitting in an inner room. "Time to plead" seemed to be the main object, so far as I could ascertain, of these uproarious wrangling meetings.

"You'll feel a little timid, perhaps, at first going before a judge at chambers, Mr. Nightingale," said Vickery. "I know I did—a good many years ago now—I was a mere boy at the time. But you'll soon get over that. I did. The judge is no more to me now than an old woman at an apple-stall." And, indeed, I perceived that the judge moved little awe in the minds of the lawyers' clerks; who seemed a self-confident, loud-speaking, sharp, and rather uncourteous class. Perhaps it was because his lordship was bereft of his wig and robes. The door of his room opening, I viewed him with much interest. He was the first judge I had ever seen. He was not impressive-looking—a little withered old man, rubbing a trembling hand over and over a very bald crown. He seemed quite worn out with fatigue, and spoke with undignified querulousness. "Further time!" he said to one applicant, "you can't go on like this, you know. There. I'll give you three days;" and he scrawled an order on the back of the summons. To another he said, "No, I can't hear you. It's no use. You

must go to the court." And he said it in a most maledictory way, as though he were bidding him go to a much more remote place.

"The Pleas, the Exchequer, the King's Bench," said Vickery, as he introduced me to the various courts, and explained, or tried to explain, the difference between sitting at *Nisi Prius* and in *Banco*. He told me the names of the judges and of the leading counsel; and he met many fellow managing clerks, as I surmised, with whom he enjoyed prolonged converse, exchanging pinches of snuff and legal jokes that I could not follow. He often mentioned me to them as "our new articulated young gentleman."

Further, he showed me the Courts of Equity. I was duly moved by the appearance of the Lord Chancellor, fronted by his gilded mace and the square embroidered bag reputed to contain that mysterious instrument the Great Seal. He sat silent and still, with down-turned eyes. I think he was asleep—there was much slumber in the Court of Chancery in those days—while a learned counsel, with a mountainous pile of documents before him, prosed and droned through an interminable address, the significance of which I could not master for a moment. The Master of the Rolls was also ex-

hibited to me, and the Vice-Chancellor of England. These wigged and robed dignitaries struck me as looking all very much alike, with something of an owl's expression of comatose sapience in all their faces. They sat on their raised judgment seats very still and patient, not much interested in the matters brought before them, yet not wearied or repelled by them either, but submissive and long-suffering, and in no sort of hurry to be relieved of their duties. They all took snuff, and used double glasses when reading or writing was required of them. They rarely interrupted the counsel addressing them. They seemed to me all profoundly convinced that the Court of Chancery was almost of divine origin, that the suitors were made for it far more than it for the suitors, and that any attempt to quicken its proceedings was to be considered and reprobated as something in the nature of a crime.

I was sometimes, but rarely, left alone in the office. On such occasions I found it advisable to continue my copying work less assiduously. I yawned and stretched myself, and drew caricatures upon my blotting-pad. I pried about somewhat, reading the notices upon the walls—one of them I remember set forth the circuit of the judges, but it was of old date—and peering into such books as I

could find. They were, for the most part, guides to the practice of the courts, with the forms requisite under certain procedures. And I looked into an old Peerage.

Now the only nobleman I had any sort of acquaintance with was Lord Overbury. So I turned to his name. I found him described as the fifth baron; Marmaduke Augustus Frederick Oglethorpe. It was strange, I thought, that he should bear the same christian name as myself, Marmaduke. I did not know it before. Nor was I aware that his lordship's family name was Oglethorpe. The dates of his birth and of his succession to the title were also recorded; the peerage was said to have been created at the coronation of King George the Second.

I read also, greatly to my amazement, of his lordship's marriage, some sixteen years back, with Lady Jane Wilhelmina Caroline Pomfret, daughter of the sixth Earl of Bannerville, whose marriage with Edward Gustavus, second Baron Wycherly, had been dissolved by Act of Parliament. Married? Then there had been a Lady Overbury before Rosetta.

Further I was pursuing my investigations when the office bell rang. I touched the spring com-

municating with the outer door, and presently a stranger entered the office.

He glanced in the direction of the desk usually occupied by Vickery; appeared surprised, then turned towards me. But he said nothing. I quitted my high stool and advanced towards him.

"Mr. Vickery's out at this moment, if you want him." Then pursuing the form usual under the circumstances, I said; "Mr. Monck's engaged, and is not likely to be disengaged very immediately. Is it anything I can do for you?"

The stranger laughed. "Engaged, is he? I know all about that. And Vickery out? And you're young Mr. Nightingale, I suppose, the new articulated clerk?"

I said that was my name. Thereupon he laughed again.

CHAPTER IV.

I SEEVE A WEIT.

THERE was not much to laugh at that I could see. Yet the stranger's laugh was not aggressive or unpleasant, but rather, as it seemed to me, the irrepressible result of a natural cheeriness and geniality of disposition. He was a young gentleman of about my own age, with bright, twinkling, blue eyes, and a delicately mobile mouth, that seemed readily tickled into a mirthful form. His whole face, which was smooth and lightly tinted, and not to be described as handsome so much as pretty, wore a femininely sensitive and impressionable look. He was smartly dressed in a blue coat and close-fitting lavender trousers, strapped under his shiny sharp-pointed boots; he carried an ebony cane, silver-topped, and decked with swinging silken tassels. Removing his glossy hat for a moment, he passed his thin fingers through his

wavy flaxen hair, arranging it in clusters on either side of his face. In my own mind I accounted him quite what we then called a "buck." He had a smart London air about him, which I had not yet been able to acquire. Indeed, by the side of him I felt that I was more than ever a "yokel." And I was constrained and diffident in his jaunty self-satisfied presence. Not that I could find fault with him, or wish him changed. His manner was perfectly natural, and his little airs and graces seemed to suit him as completely as his dapper clothes fitted him. Indeed I felt myself attracted to him, his smile and glance were so winning, and his dainty prettiness of aspect and manner was altogether so admirable.

"Will you be seated?" I proffered him our hard wooden office chair.

"No, thank you, Mr. Nightingale. I'll not stay. This place makes me melancholy. It always did. I hope it doesn't affect you in the same way. But I sat at your desk once—I was a clerk here, studying law, as you are now studying it." Here he laughed. I blushed, for I felt that my so-called legal studies had something ridiculous about them. "But I really couldn't stand it. The law and this office were quite too much for me, to say nothing of

old Vickery. Then I'm a flighty sort of person, you know. I felt like a bird in a cage." It seemed to me that this was a fair description of him. He was as a sprightly bird of gay plumage; the office must have been a dreadful prison to him. "So I and the law parted company," he continued. "But I'm detaining you. Your time's precious, I dare say, Mr. Nightingale."

I could not help regarding this rather as a joke. "You know my name, it seems," I said.

"Oh yes, I've heard of you before. I hope you find yourself comfortable here, and may like your profession better than I did. No, I won't stay, thank you, I'm much obliged. Good morning, Mr. Nightingale."

He was going; but he paused with his hand upon the lock of the door.

"I don't know that it matters much," he said. "But as I know your name, Mr. Nightingale, you may care to know mine. My name is Wray, Anthony Wray, but I am generally called Tony. People seem to think it suits me better, and I don't object. I dare say they're right. Tony Wray. Perhaps we may meet again some day."

"I'll tell Mr. Vickery that you called, Mr. Wray."

"Oh, just as you like about that. It doesn't really matter, you know. Good-bye."

A wave of his white handkerchief, wafting towards me a scent of lavender, and he was gone.

He did not quit the house, though. The outer door did not close behind him. I listened. I could hear his light nimble step as he mounted the stairs. I hesitated. But I decided that it was no business of mine; that I was clearly not entitled to interfere. Probably Mr. Wray was privileged to enter the mysterious upper regions of the house. Otherwise he would surely not have gone there. I heard a door on the first floor close behind him. It was all right enough, there could be no question.

I resumed my study of the Peerage. But what remained was of inferior interest. I read, however, that the family motto of Lord Overbury was "*Virtute et fide*," which did not strike me as particularly appropriate; that his crest was "*a dexter arm couped below the elbow, vested argent, and grasping a club or*," which my lack of heraldic learning did not enable me to comprehend very fully; his coat of arms and supporters were also described, and then, by reference to the illustrative plate, I was able to identify these armorial bearings with the carvings adorning Overbury Hall. Further I

gathered that, in addition to Overbury Hall, his lordship was possessed of Brackley Castle, Cumberland; that the family was of great antiquity, had been enriched by intermarriage with other distinguished houses, and received territorial grants from Henry the Eighth at the dissolution of the monasteries; that a certain Charles Richard Oglethorpe had been sheriff of the county in the ninth year of the reign of James the First; that the Oglethorpes had espoused the cause of the Stuarts during the great civil war, and thereby incurred much loss of property; that a certain Fletcher Vandaleur Oglethorpe had been bred to the bar in Queen Anne's time; and been appointed a judge of the Queen's Bench; with much more detailed information of the same kind. The book, however, was not of recent date. It did not set forth, therefore, the death of Lord Overbury's first wife. She must be dead, of course, or how could he have married Rosetta? Nor did it mention whether his lordship had any issue by his first marriage. Moreover, there seemed some doubt as to who was the next heir to the barony.

Old Vickery returned. I thought it becoming to close the Peerage, and to return to my copying work. Old Vickery eyed me suspiciously for a minute or two, and then inquired, "Anything hap-

pened in my absence, Mr. Nightingale?" He seemed able to read in my face that something had happened.

"Mr. Wray called—Mr. Anthony Wray. He left no message."

"Precisely. Mr. Wray. He would call. No; he was not likely to leave any message."

"He went up-stairs, I think."

"You think, Mr. Nightingale? It doesn't matter much in this case, only, as a rule, never think when you know. Thinking isn't evidence. No doubt he went up-stairs. He would go up-stairs. He was likely to."

"He told me that he had occupied this desk himself, but that he didn't like the law."

"Precisely." Then, after a pause, he added: "You see, Mr. Nightingale, whether he did or did not like the law as a profession is of little concern to anybody but himself. Perhaps the law did not like him, and the separation was by mutual consent." He was silent for some time. Presently he resumed. "Don't, Mr. Nightingale, understand me to be saying anything disrespectful of Mr. Wray. A pleasant young man, I call him. But there never was, and never will be, the making of a lawyer about him. There may be other things in

him—I don't say no—but there isn't that. A pleasant young man, as I said; and, if you must know"—this was scarcely fair; I had certainly not insisted upon knowing; but Vickery liked to affect that information was extorted from him rather than supplied voluntarily—"if you must know, he's Mr. Monck's nephew, and he calls here now and then, and, not troubling himself to consider whether it's convenient or not, or whether Mr. Monck is or is not particularly engaged, or too much occupied to care to see him or anybody else, he goes up-stairs. I mention the matter lest he should call again at any time and I should happen not to be in the way. For no other reason. As Mr. Monck's nephew, he's at liberty, or considers himself so, to go up-stairs or where he will. You need not take any notice of the fact. Now you know all about Mr. Anthony Wray. That is all. I hope you're getting on nicely with that fair copy on brief paper you've had so long in hand, Mr. Nightingale."

I said that I was getting on nicely, I thanked him, with a mental reservation that nicely did not mean absolutely the same thing as rapidly: for, as a matter of fact, my progress had not been remarkable.

It was a day or two after this that Vickery took

me out with him, leaving the office in the charge of Scoons. We did not, for a wonder, walk in the direction of the offices, but turned towards the western regions of London. Soon we were among the club-houses of Pall-Mall. Vickery seemed to be in no hurry, but I noticed that he looked about him almost anxiously as we advanced. He said little.

We paused at the corner of a street. Vickery leant against a lamp-post and took snuff. His gaze was fixed upon the flight of steps and classic portico of a massive corner building of white stone. It occurred to me that he was taking unwonted interest in the achievements of architecture.

Suddenly he started. A man had issued from the building, and was standing at the top of the flight of steps. He looked up and down, and waited, as though he were in search of his carriage.

"That's my man," said Vickery, quietly, and he produced from his breast-pocket a long narrow slip of parchment, and a corresponding long narrow slip of paper. "Now let me see if you can serve a writ, Mr. Nightingale. This will be practical learning to you. You see that gentleman on the steps? You will go to him. Show him this parchment, hand him this paper, and leave it with him. Mind

that. It's very simple. There's nothing to be afraid of. If he asks at whose suit, say Dicker Brothers. Go at once. Do it sharply. I shall be here if there's any difficulty or trouble. But there won't be. You understand?"

I did not much like the errand. But I could scarcely object to it. Was it not part of my profession? Still I was rather ashamed. I knew that my face was burning, and that my heart was beating with unaccustomed force and rapidity.

I hastened to the gentleman, leaving Vickery in the background inspecting me.

"What is it, my lad?" said the gentleman, as I mounted the steps and stood beside him.

He was tall and thin, dressed in handsome dark-coloured clothes. He was very pale, with aquiline features, heavy straight eyebrows, large deep black eyes, and iron-grey hair.

"If you please, I'm to give you this—a copy of a writ. This is the writ."

In my hurry and confusion I was nearly presenting him with the parchment original and retaining possession of the paper copy.

"A writ, eh?" A light flush of colour appeared in his white face; his brows lowered, and he bit his lower lip as he glanced towards me rather angrily.

"Yes, a writ, if you please. That's the copy. This is the original I hold in my hand."

"What's the amount claimed?"

"It's written on the other side, sir, I think."

"Oh, I see. Seventy-six pounds eight and tenpence. Dicker Brothers. I thought I'd paid it long since. It shall be attended to, young man. Provoking. I'm careless about these things. Where do you come from?"

"From Mr. Monck, solicitor, of Golden-square. The name's on the back of the paper, sir."

"True. Say I'll attend to it. I'm sorry there should have been this trouble about so trumpery a matter. I'll see to it at once, and call or send a cheque. That will do."

I was going when he laid his hand upon my shoulder, and seemed to turn the light of his large eyes fully, almost fiercely upon me. He stood for a moment looking into my face intently, and yet as though he had forgotten what he purposed to say.

"What's your name, boy?"

I told him. He repeated the name after me in a musing way, as he gently withdrew his hand from my shoulder.

"And you're a process-server? Isn't that rather an ignoble occupation?"

I mentioned that I had never served a writ before.

"I think I wouldn't serve one again, if I were you," he observed.

I explained that I was Mr. Monck's articulated clerk, and that I was bound to obey orders.

"His articulated clerk? Well, that sounds better than process-server. And you're to be a lawyer? Well, you might be something worse, perhaps. I say, perhaps—I'm not sure, knowing little enough of the subject. It's not a pleasant profession to my thinking; but then I'm not a lawyer."

I waited, for he seemed about to say something more. But after another look at me he simply smiled and nodded in a not unkindly way, and I understood that my task was accomplished. I took the parchment back to Vickery, leaving the gentleman standing on the steps holding in his hand the paper I had left with him.

"What did he say?" Vickery inquired.

"He said he'll attend to it, and call or send a cheque; and he asked my name."

"Ah! he'd better attend to it. Asked your name, did he? But that doesn't matter. He didn't

threaten you, did he? In my time I've known of process-servers being assaulted and pretty nigh killed. But I was sure that wouldn't happen in this case, Mr. Nightingale. I knew whom I had to deal with. These fine club gentlemen are used to writs. They rather like them, I do believe. It's excitement for them. They couldn't get on without excitement. All the better for us. Well, you've learnt something practical to-day, Mr. Nightingale. You now know how to serve a writ; and that's really an important matter. The first step in an action at common law. But for the new Act we should have taken the gentleman to the lock-up straight-way. They will keep on reforming the law: spoiling it to my thinking. The law's a very good law, if they'd only leave it alone. You never hear lawyers complaining of it, and of course they're the best judges, knowing more about it than anybody else."

CHAPTER V.

TONY.

AT Vickery's bidding, on our return to the office, I duly endorsed my name on the writ as the person who had served it. Dicker Brothers, the plaintiffs in the action, were tailors in the Quadrant. I omitted to notice the name of the defendant, Vickery, I think, rather hindered me from acquiring this information, although I was not really curious on the subject. He always preferred to be mysterious whenever he possibly could; not that there could have been any real necessity for mystery in the present case; but secrecy and stealthiness had intrinsic and irresistible charms for him. He delighted, himself, in worming out hidden matters, and found pleasure in providing occupation of this kind for others, if they cared to avail themselves thereof. I did not to any great extent.

But two facts, in connexion with the affairs of

the office, soon came to my knowledge, with little stir on my part. In the first place it could not be concealed from me that Mr. Monck's circumstances were somewhat embarrassed. There seemed to be difficulty at times in his providing money to defray the current expenses of his business. Creditors began to call with increasing frequency, and were dissatisfied with the answers returned to their applications. They could not understand any more than I could Mr. Monck's constant invisibility, and were suspicious of the incessant engagements that held him aloof from them. They were not as yet angrily clamorous; but it was plain that their patience was yielding. And other evidence was not wanting. Vickery, of course, made no sign, and whether his stipend as managing clerk was or not paid to him, could not be discovered. I fancied, however, that of late he had looked somewhat additionally pinched in appearance, and that his dress betrayed shabbiness and neglect that might fairly be attributed to access of poverty; while it was certain that the small wages of the boy Scoons were some weeks in arrear. I could hear him, in a dream-like condition, murmuring as much from his murky corner of the office; and as a consequence, perhaps, he grew quite vindictive in his wasteful treatment of

the ink, and his cruel assaults upon the candles with the sharp point of the snuffers.

In the second place, it was plain that Mr. Monck's business, to say the least of it, did not increase. Now and then, as in the case of Dicker Brothers, some tradesman in the neighbourhood required legal aid in rousing the attention of a negligent customer; and in such wise a lawyer's letter was occasionally despatched, or a writ of summons issued and served. But this was really exceptional. There was in truth very little doing in Mr. Monck's office. Nevertheless he appeared to enjoy considerable repute as a practising solicitor. The house in Golden-square was rich in traditions of former important transactions. Mr. Monck's business had at one time, no doubt, been of a valuable and distinguished kind. But it now seemed to be subsisting upon its past fame. So far as I could comprehend the matter, Mr. Monck and his father before him had enjoyed a very profitable connexion with the West Indies. They were the representatives in this country of numerous planters and colonial proprietors, and had been charged with the conduct of many Chancery suits, and appeals to the Privy Council and the House of Lords, upon the subject of West Indian interests. All this had, without

doubt, been very lucrative to the lawyers. But the recent abolition of the slave trade had, with other influences, greatly depreciated colonial property, and as a consequence diminished litigation in that regard. No new business of this class came to Mr. Monck while I remained his articled clerk.

Still it must not be supposed that we were absolutely idle and without occupation. We were as a theatrical manager who does not depend for existence so much upon the productions of new entertainments as upon an established repertory. We had, so to speak, our stock pieces, which proved themselves fairly remunerative. These were Chancery suits, for the most part, which, as I judged, had long been as heir-looms in the Monck family. They were subject to cataleptic seizures, and remained apparently inanimate for very prolonged periods. Still they awoke of themselves, or were roused by others at intervals, and were found to be yet possessed of life to some extent. At any rate they had money in their pockets, and, properly handled by the solicitors concerned, they yielded up this in the shape of costs, like sluggard travellers upon the compulsion of footpads. Some few cases of this kind—and no reasonable lawyer could expect to benefit by more than a few—yet remained in Mr.

Monck's office, and kept it going after a fashion : the machinery working slowly and uneasily, with jarring and creaking, from lack of oil and power. But this was the normal method of Chancery movement at that period.

Of these prodigious and venerable proceedings of immemorial origin, and though still existing, fallen into exceeding dotage and decrepitude, I really knew little more than the names. Even these were complicated by supplemental and *ex parte* transactions, by the original case having littered, as it were, and produced a progeny of descendant and additional suits. Still, in the ardour of my noviciate, I made repeated efforts to master certain of their complications and mysteries. In all there was unquestionably a "fund in court," the origin and mainspring of the litigation. Round this fund in court generations of plaintiffs and defendants had gathered, and fought and perished, bequeathing their share in the property, or rather their share in the contest for the property, to their descendants, who had struggled on until, in their turn, death had overtaken them, and others filled their places, armed with their abandoned weapons. In one suit—I think it was Dobson versus Dicks—in addition to the fund in court a landed estate called the Happy

Retreat, in the Island of St. Mungo, was also the subject of strife. This property, I remember, had frequently been valued and revalued, and the most fluctuating opinions prevailed as to its worth. There was a testator who had made an incomprehensible will, and appointed trustees and executors, some of whom would act and some wouldn't. There were various charges upon the estate, and a fierce struggle had arisen among the mortgagees as to who held the first, and who the last, encumbrances. There were trustees also of the testator's marriage settlement charged to pay an annuity to his widow, out of the income of the estate, and intrusted with separate provisions for the behoof of the children of the marriage, who were thus brought in and made parties to the suit. Then the widow had married the overseer of the estate, and so the case was recruited by more trustees and a fresh family. The overseer claimed to be a partner in the estate, or to have some extraordinary lien upon its profits. Doubts had arisen as to the formality of the testator's marriage, and as to his capacity for executing a will, and thereupon all his next of kin had come in as claimants. Next the consignees of the produce of the estate asserted themselves to be secured creditors for an enormous amount, while on

the other hand efforts were made to demonstrate that they were in truth debtors for an equally large sum. Some one had gone mad, and committees of the lunatic had to be appointed, and accounts taken of his revenues and possessions. Some one else had gone bankrupt, and in such wise a swarm of representatives, assignees, and creditors had been added to the suit. There were numberless infants who appeared by their next friends, and whose interests the court was supposed to watch over most jealously, even to keeping them all tightly bound hand and foot. There was some one always paying large sums of money for premiums on policies of insurance on the life of some one else, and a great question had arisen as to where the money was to come from that was to pay these premiums, and as to whether any one was really entitled to receive the amount of the policies when the assured's life dropped. Of course some of the parties to the suit had been committed for contempt, and it was supposed that a few had died in the Fleet or the King's Bench prison, unable to purge themselves of their sins in that respect. Moreover, some of the parties had disappeared altogether; and though they had been advertised for, and all sorts of officers of the court

directed to search and inquire and report concerning them, still they were not forthcoming, and it was conjectured that they were hiding away in the uttermost corners of the earth, expressly to be out of the reach of the Lord Chancellor, and out of hearing of the case of Dobson versus Dicks. Of course everything had to be doubted and proved, and of course everybody questioned and derided the claims and the evidence offered by everybody else. There were doubts about births, about marriages, about deaths, about every mortal thing, indeed. A fresh crop of difficulties was always growing, and any sort of a practical close to the suit seemed to become more and more inconceivable and impossible. It had outlived I don't know how many Chancellors. The original will was supposed to bear date some time in the last century. The shuttlecock had been first struck by the then Master of the Rolls, and had since been creditably battledored by his successors and the Chancellors and Appeal Courts for the time being. It was heard and reheard, was "spoken to," came on for "further directions," or "on petition;" was argued and re-argued; was now referred to this Master, now to that, then to the other; evidence was required and affidavits beyond number were filed, and witnesses

were examined upon interrogatories. States of Facts were carried into the Master's Office, followed by Further States of Facts and Counter-States of Facts, and accounts were taken and schedules sworn to, and every document had to be draft-copied, and fair-copied, and office-copied, and brief-copied for counsel, and every party to the suit had to be formally served with a copy of everything. It was certainly a wonderful suit—at least it was so in my eyes. Vickery never appeared to think that there was anything very remarkable about it. I presume that he understood it thoroughly, but I am not sure. I know I never did. I have only hinted at a few heads of it, appearing like patches of dry land above a dark unfathomable sea. For my labours as an articled clerk in Mr. Monck's office were chiefly devoted to copying the multitudinous and ever-increasing documents in Dobson versus Dicks.

One day I was dining at the house in Rupert-street.

"I felt sure that we should meet again, Mr. Nightingale." Mr. Tony Wray was the speaker. "May I sit at your table?" Of course he might. I was thankful enough for the chance of bettering my acquaintance with so pleasant-spoken a young gentleman.

"You dine here pretty often, I suppose? I used to when I was at Mr. Monck's. And I come here still every now and then, just to see how things are going on, you know. Roast mutton will do very well, I think, William; and say apple-pudding to follow." This was to the waiter. "I like this house. Wilkie and Haydon used to come here, you know, and that gives it a sort of artistic and historic interest. Wilkie I've never seen; but Haydon I have often. I attended his lectures. They were really grand. And he stood behind me once when I was copying the Theseus in the British Museum. 'The Greeks were Gods,' he said; 'but don't follow them slavishly. Nature before everything; never forget her or try to dispense with her; refer to her always. Your eye is correct; but your hand is infirm. When you begin to paint, paint everything life-size. Study anatomy, dissect, cleave to the skeleton, master the muscles. Your drawing wants force; but for so young a student it's commendable. I tell you so—I, Benjamin Robert Haydon.' That was what he said. A short man, wearing spectacles, with a high, bald, shining forehead, and a firm, ringing voice. I thought it kind of him; for my drawing was but a poor thing. Still it

was encouraging and interesting of him to notice me."

"You are an artist?"

"Well, I should prefer to call myself a student. Though of course, in a certain sense, an artist is always a student. But I've done little enough as yet; I'm only a beginner; though I intend to do great things of course; who doesn't? I've rather a knack of beginning things. The difficulty I find is in going on with them. I began law once, as you know. But somehow I couldn't get on with that at all, though I tried to, for a time. Yes, and I copied all sorts of papers, writing as neatly as I could; and I actually read a book or two—not that I understood them. I don't pretend that for a moment. And I began medicine once. It struck me it was rather a good notion feeling people's pulses and looking at their tongues; punching them in the side, asking if it hurt them, and then looking wise, and writing a prescription for them. I thought that was just the business to suit me. I really thought I might rise to great distinction as a doctor. But it was of no use. I'd forgotten to take into account the dissecting-room, the hospitals, the surgical operations, and all that part of the business. My nervous system—I may say my stomach

—refused to stand it. I bought a head once for anatomical purposes; but I couldn't touch it after I'd bought it. I felt as though I'd murdered some one, or were engaged in some hideous crime. So I gave the head away to a fellow-student; he was glad enough to get it. He'd no compunctions, bless you. He had the skull polished and made into a sort of tobacco jar. I'm not sure he didn't drink out of it. But it was odd, I thought, Haydon telling me to dissect. I had dissected, as it happened; at any rate I had made a beginning that way. And I do know something of anatomy—the bones, the muscles, and all that kind of thing.”

“And you'll go on with art?”

“Yes, I think so; for I adore art, and a fellow must go on with something, you know. I've always held that opinion. And I've real taste for art, and, if I may say so, am rather clever at it than not. I haven't done much, of course, at present. That was hardly to be expected. I'm young, you see, and I always feel that in cases of this kind there's never any real occasion for hurry. I simply ask for time to turn round and look about me and consider the bearings of things. I like to go on in my own way, which is rather, perhaps, a leisurely kind of way. Not that I am without enthusiasm. I abound in

enthusiasm, and I am always looking forward to grand achievements. Looking forward is, indeed, quite an occupation in itself. I find myself constantly employed in that way. I can even see myself in the distant future—I don't pretend to say it will be very immediately—elected President of the Royal Academy. That will happen, I dare say, much about the time you receive your appointment, or patent, whatever it's called, as Lord Chancellor."

"I hope it may happen before that," I said.

"You're very kind. It may or it may not. I promise not to be disappointed in either case. Still I should much like in my position as President to be painting your portrait as Lord Chancellor. I think I could do a good deal with such a subject as that. Your head, in a certain light, has really an impressive aspect. I should take a three-quarter view of your face. I think. It's characteristic of chancellors, you know, to be turning a little away from the present to keep the past in view. Then the wig and robes, the mace and seal—I should really enjoy painting those accessories. There's a great deal to be done in art in the way of carefully rendering details and compelling them to help tell

the story of a picture. I should make a really fine work of your portrait. I feel that; I'm quite confident about it. Indeed, I feel tempted to order in a large canvas and begin upon the thing at once."

I suggested that it would be certainly premature to paint me in the character of chancellor, and to this he laughingly assented. "It would only be taking time by the forelock, however; and, you know, we're always recommended to do that. I never have yet, that I know of; and it seems a pity to abandon so good a chance of doing it."

I found his talk and manner delightful; both were so new to me. And there was a certain graceful, airy unconsciousness about all he said and did that won upon me greatly. His speech might be nonsensical, but his simple faith in its soundness was indisputable. He was admirably unaffected. And though he seemed to be idly prattling he was plainly sincere the while, for the moment. He spoke with effortless liveliness, sensible that his utterances possessed an element of humour, yet laying no stress upon this or demanding its recognition; he talked on from mere natural cheeriness of heart, with a sort of quiet fervour underlying even his strangest speeches. His blue eyes twinkled and his face was lit up with a frank, genial intelligence as

he spoke; the while his dainty white hands fluttered like birds about him in appropriate unstudied action. He talked himself quite out of breath.

"I'm devoted to art, as I said. But I don't avoid other pursuits. I can't deny the charms of literature. Indeed, at one time I had really a great mind to be a poet. I think—I say it with all modesty—I possess some gifts that way. I'll own to you that I have dabbled in the waves of Helicon—just gone in up to the ankles—not much more than that. I've never really plunged in headlong. Still I found it pleasant. The water did not strike cold upon me. It was agreeably warm. Some find it boiling, no doubt; and some ice-cold. It was tepid; that was my feeling about it. But I keep on prating about myself. How vain and egotistical you'll think me. I'm not so really, Mr. Nightingale, I do assure you. Tell me how you're doing. How do you get on with Mr. Monck, my uncle. You know that, I suppose?"

I stated that I had not yet had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Monck.

"Not seen him? But no, of course not, I forgot." He checked himself as he was about to say something. "I must not tell tales out of

school," he added ; and for a moment he looked grave and remained silent.

Tony Wray and I swore an eternal friendship : not in words or ceremoniously ; but the matter was perfectly understood between us all the same.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW FRIEND AND AN OLD ONE.

"WHAT! You live in Featherstone-buildings?" said Tony, when I asked him to come and see me there. "Really, you seem to have stepped into my shoes in a most surprising way. You sit at my desk in my uncle's office, and you live in Featherstone-buildings, where I lived when I studied law. I can quite believe that you occupy the very same rooms on the second floor."

And so it proved. Tony Wray had been the articled clerk of whom Vickery had spoken.

"I gave up the rooms," he continued, "when I gave up the law. The two were somehow connected in my mind, and so I abandoned both at the same moment. If you're going to make a change I always think it's as well to do it completely. Sweep everything off the board, and start fair and fresh. I've got a bedroom now at Hampstead, near the

Vale of Health, for I've not been very well lately, and I've been recommended to sleep out of town, and the Vale of Health struck me as being just the thing. But I've a town residence also—I couldn't do without that—a kind of den in Staple Inn, Holborn, not far from you. You must come and see me. It's a little bit of a place, but it suits me until I really advance in my profession—I'm only beginning it at present—and a house in Cavendish-square—(I intend to move there some day—I have the exact house in my eye, indeed)—would be more than I could manage just now. My room is just the place for study. I pursue my art there most admirably; that is I think about pursuing it. The roof slopes a good deal, so that you might think yourself in a tent in the desert; for it would be wonderfully quiet if it wasn't for the cats. There's no view from the window; so you see there's little to disturb a studious mind. The place is something of a studio and something of a library. You'll like the look of it, I'm sure. My easel's there, and my paint-box, and a canvas or two, and my books—some legal, some medical, others miscellaneous. Altogether it's very complete and comfortable, if confined. But I don't want a large place, you know; and then it's cheap, and of course that's an

object. For my means are limited. Did I tell you that I was an orphan? I lost both father and mother when I was quite a child—I can scarcely remember them. My uncle, Mr. Monck, was left my guardian. He deals with my little patrimony so as to make it yield as large an income as possible. And my wants are few, and some day I hope to be earning large sums by my professional labours; so you see, altogether, in a quiet way, I'm comfortable and happy enough. That's my story, Mr. Nightingale. But I can't really go on calling you Mr. Nightingale; I must say Duke, please, and if you could teach yourself to address me as Tony I should esteem it a favour. There's one advantage in having a long name, you can always cut it down."

I called him Tony thenceforward, and he called me Duke, and having heard his story, of course I told him mine. He was deeply interested, especially in the Rosetta episode of my narrative. This I disposed of briefly in the first instance, but as our friendship strengthened, I was not reluctant to discourse upon it very fully.

"Dear me," he said, "why it's quite a romance. And she was beautiful? But she was must have been if she was anything like your description of her, and I'm sure that's accurate. And you loved

her! How interesting! I wish something of that kind would happen to me. How I should enjoy it! But nothing like that ever has happened to me. I've never been in love. No, I've never even fancied myself in love; and certainly, so far as I know, no one has ever been good enough to fall in love with me. Unless——" he hesitated, his face flushed a little, then, with a light toss of his head, he seemed to put the subject away from him. "And so she became Lord Overbury's wife! I think I've heard of Lord Overbury's name before. I'm not sure that there was not once some business connected with him in Mr. Monck's office; before my time though. I've a dim recollection of something of that kind."

I suggested that, as Lord Overbury was notoriously much involved, Mr. Monck might well have been concerned on behalf of one of the noblemen's many creditors. Tony thought that very possible.

He showed me his drawings, and in turn I exhibited mine. We exchanged congratulations on our progress in art, though I could not conceal from myself that my friend's works, if graceful and dexterous to a certain extent, were yet rather deficient in force and substance. He read me his poems. I thought them weak, though I did not

say so. I read him mine, including many stanzas addressed to Rosetta. He was loud in his applause, and warmly urged me to continue my poetic efforts. It was not long after my first acquaintance with Tony that I commenced writing a blank-verse tragedy in five acts, founded upon a Venetian story, and entitled *The Daughter of the Doge*. I gave readings of this work, act by act, as I progressed with it, at my lodgings in Featherstone-buildings. Tony was my only audience, for I don't count my landlady and fellow-lodgers, although they could not but overhear my declamation. Indeed they complained rather angrily of its disturbing nature. But the play was not read to them, or designed for their ears, and I thought their objections certainly coarse and uncalled for. I said as much to my landlady. "I did so hope that you'd be steady, sir," was her only reply, as she shook her head at me with a disappointed air. Tony admired the tragedy exceedingly. I invited his criticism, and assured him that I should greatly value and fully consider any suggestions he might have to offer upon the subject. But he found the work perfect. "I wouldn't have a line or a word altered," he said. "Touch it, and you spoil it. It seems to me one of the finest tragedies in the language." Could I ask for more

cordial approval? What wonder that I loved him?

I see now that his absolute lack of critical or judicial faculty greatly endeared him to me. I took blame to myself that I was unable to applaud his labours as heartily as he applauded mine. Yet his candour and fervour were quite unquestionable. He had entire faith in his praises of me. He really believed that I was a great artist and a distinguished poet. Not that I wholly credited all he said of me, or ventured to think his opinion would prove to be the world's verdict; I promised to be fully satisfied if others would accept me at any approach to Tony's appraisal. But I began to think more of myself, if less than he thought of me. Nevertheless ours was not a friendship that depended upon mutual admiration. He gave liberally, but he asked for little in return. He was content with quite a modicum of approval. His estimate of himself was really humble. He was most unselfish. Such vanity as he possessed was of a thoroughly pleasant kind, and really seemed a becoming adornment of him; it was part of his good-natured view, genial of all around him.

To me this new friendship with a young fellow of my own standing, little more experienced in the

ways of the world, was of extreme comfort. My life in London was no longer tedious and solitary; it became replete with harmless, or not very harmful, pleasure. We were constantly together. We met at the dining rooms in Rupert-street, and, my official duties concluded, we adjourned to my lodgings or to his chambers. Sometimes we went together to the play. And we talked on all kinds of subjects, notably upon art, literature, and the drama, with occasional wild incursions into the vague regions of metaphysics. Little injury resulted, perhaps, from these debates, except that we were tempted to keep unduly late hours, and to consume more tobacco, and to empty more glasses than was altogether advisable. Tony gave up his lodging at Hampstead, and contented himself with his town residence. His health was not benefited by this change.

Our friendship was made up of what Rousseau has held to be the best materials in that respect: similar sentiments, different opinions. Or it had perhaps a safer foundation in a reciprocity of kindly thoughts, words, and deeds. Our characters were unlike somewhat, yet each seemed competent to understand and appreciate the other. There was no rivalry between us; if we were both aiming at public recognition and distinction, it was in so pro-

spective and distant a way that no thought of competition disturbed us ; it was rather as though we had joined forces against a common foe. And we were not critics of each other's capacity, even though I found myself less enthusiastic on Tony's side than he was on mine. On either hand there was, at any rate, no throwing of cold water—better, perhaps, if there had been. If excuse is needed for us—and perhaps only the cynical will insist upon apology in such case—we were both very young, and, seeing that youth must love some one or something, we were, for the time being, in the absence of other objects of affection, in love with friendship. Between us there soon took root and growth an agreement and pact of this nature, strong, effusive, and unreasonable, possibly, but yet, without doubt, sincere enough.

I wrote home glowing accounts of my new friend, and the solace and happiness he had conferred upon my life. My mother was much interested. She asked innumerable questions concerning him, even as to his looks, and manner, and mode of life. She was most anxious, it was clear, that I should make no unworthy acquaintance. She was more satisfied when I had fully replied to all her interrogatories. She looked forward, as I

began to do myself, to his visiting the Down Farm in my company. I felt that she desired to contemplate my friend with her own eyes. Yet she transmitted him many kindly messages, and when a hamper of game, or poultry, or other produce of the farm was sent to me in London, there was now always an additional supply to be placed at the disposal of Tony Wray. The invisibility of Mr. Monck was no longer commented upon. It had given place to this new topic.

I was returning to the office one evening after dinner. I confess that I was rather late. I had, indeed, surrendered those habits of punctuality which had originally distinguished my career as an articled clerk. I had rather taken up with opinions to the effect that the law was a loitering kind of profession.

The office was feebly lighted, but I perceived that a stranger was standing by Vickery's desk. I could not see his face very well, it was shadowed by his hat.

"Bank-notes and gold for the full amount," he said, and it seemed to me that his voice was familiar to me. "For the full amount, including costs. You will be good enough to give me a receipt. I am also instructed to say that the claim would have

been satisfied long since but that it was overlooked—by inadvertence, sheer inadvertence. We are much occupied by very important matters, and trifles of this kind are likely to be overlooked. We cannot always be bearing in mind the claims of tradesmen. They should be content with our recollecting them when we have need of their services. It was not right to issue a writ; it was wrong to serve it. I say so much on my own account. I was not bidden to say it. But I happen to have an innate and constitutional objection to legal proceedings of every kind. However, I tender you the amount due. I am instructed to give no trouble in that respect, although I am well aware—I speak from experience—that claims are not usually settled so promptly or so pacifically.”

He spoke rather pompously, and as one enjoying the cadences of his loud, rich, but somewhat husky voice. Vickery was writing out a receipt for him.

“A lawyer’s office,” said the stranger, glancing round him, but his eyes did not chance to rest upon me. “I’ve seen one before; indeed, I have seen many. Lawyers’ offices are the ante-rooms of debtors’ prisons. That’s my view of them. They are mouse-traps, easy to get into, hard to escape from.”

He smiled, then took off his hat, with rather an exaggerated air of politeness, as Vickery handed him the receipt. His hair was thinly streaked over rather a bald head. He strutted out.

“Who is that?” I asked.

“I don’t know. He’s paid the debt due by the party you served the writ upon the other day. What does it matter who he is?”

It darted into my mind; the man, though considerably altered, was my old friend Mauleverer—Fane Mauleverer!

I hurried after him. The square and street were empty and dark. I turned to the right, and ran some yards. But I was too late. Mauleverer had vanished.

CHAPTER VII.

I AM WANTED.

It was clear that Mauleverer had not recognised me. I was really vexed that I had failed to overtake him. I obtained no sympathy, however, from old Vickery. He evaded my questions and forthwith locked up all the papers connected with Messrs. Dicker Brothers' action. If I could have ascertained the name and address of the defendant, I might have discovered Mauleverer. There could be no doubt that he was in the employ of the gentleman I had served with the writ.

Of course I informed Tony of the matter. From my previous narrative he knew all that I knew about Mauleverer. He was amused with this supplemental news, and expressed his interest therein. But he would not admit that there was anything strange in the fact of my again meeting with my old friend the stroller.

"Of course you have seen him again," Tony said in his pleasant way, "and equally of course you will see him again by-and-by. I often think the world was made round expressly to enable people to meet. If it was a flat plane, you know, we might all go travelling on in parallel lines and never meet a soul; and when we got to the brink tumble off into chaos, and no one know that we had ever existed or had ceased to exist. As it is we go round and round, and we must meet some one. Why not a friend, then, as likely as a stranger? My wonder is that we don't meet our friends oftener. Life is made up of meetings. It is true that there are partings, too; but then those partings are, as it were, preludes to further meetings. All the same I wish you had overtaken Mauleverer. I should really like to see him. You might have brought him up to my chambers. He was an artist, you say, as well as an actor? All the better. Not that I think black-shade cutting a very elevated branch of the profession. Still there's a good deal to be said for it, no doubt. I never tried it, but I question if it's so easy as it looks. Mauleverer should have cut out a black-shade of me if he felt so inclined. I'd have made a sketch of him, say, in chalks. And he might have read Shakespeare to

us ; you say he was a great hand at that. I should have much pleasure, I'm sure, in listening to him. Or better still, he might read out your tragedy. Not but what, old fellow, you know, you read it as well as it could possibly be read. And a finer work let me tell you——”

I omit his glowing and certainly excessive laudation of my performance.

“But you'll meet Mauleverer again,” he continued. “You may be quite easy as to that. Have you anything special to say to him when you do meet him ?”

I admitted that I had not. But I owned to curiosity concerning him and his proceedings, and particularly I desired to know his connexion with the gentleman I had served with the writ.

It was some days after this. I was sitting at my desk, copying, or perhaps making believe to copy. Vickery approached me with a solemn air, and whispered mysteriously :

“I am to ask you, Mr. Nightingale, to step up-stairs to the first floor—the front drawing-room.”

“Who wants me—Mr. Monck ?”

“You will probably learn that up-stairs, Mr. Nightingale. The front room, please. You needn't mind about leaving your work.”

Of course I did not mind about it. Upstairs? I was to enter for the first time the secret chambers of the house; possibly to penetrate the strange seclusion of my master, Mr. Monck.

I mounted the stairs. I paused and tapped at the door I found facing me. "Come in," said a light voice.

A young lady, simply clad in a dark dress that fell in soft folds about her slender figure, was seated before a writing-table littered with papers. The light, strained through the dust-clouded window-panes, gleamed feebly upon her, failing to reach the corners of the room. I perceived, however, that she was young and refined-looking, with abundant dark hair smoothed over her brow, and gathered into rich coils and clusters at the back of her head. A narrow collar of white lace edged the top of her high dress. By contrast with it, her complexion seemed to be of a dusky brunette hue, yet of fine satiny texture. When she spoke her pallor vanished, and as her large eyes kindled, an underflush of colour glowed in her face. It was a young face, animated and full of expression, earnest and intent, even somewhat sad.

The room was large; the furniture worn and very old-fashioned; the hangings of a faded dun

colour; the wall paper and ceiling dim with smoke and dust; the carpet frayed and threadbare, all trace of pattern rubbed and trodden from it.

The lady rose as I entered.

"I must introduce myself, Mr. Nightingale," she said, with rather an embarrassed air, as she extended her hand. "My name is Rachel Monck—I am Mr. Monck's daughter."

I pressed her hand; it was very small, of delicate shape, soft and cool, though it trembled a little in mine.

"Will you sit down, please. I have been anxious for some time past to see you—to speak to you; but many things have occurred to prevent this. And now I fear I have deferred it too long. I hardly know where to begin."

Her speech was something to that effect; but I was paying less heed to her words than to the soft music of her voice, and the subdued tremulousness which lent it a peculiarly touching quality. And if she was disturbed, I was still more so. I had not yet recovered from my amazement at finding myself in Mr. Monck's drawing-room, in the presence of his daughter, of whose existence I had until then been absolutely ignorant. Vickery had spoken no word upon the subject—had afforded me no hint.

How could I suspect that in the upper regions of Mr. Monck's mysterious house there dwelt this beautiful young creature?

She paused for a few moments; then proceeded with more composure.

"You have been surprised, I dare say, that you have not yet seen my father—that you have indeed seen no one connected with his business but Mr. Vickery."

I answered feebly, as I felt afterwards. I owned to a little surprise, but said that it was really of no consequence. This was stupid; because it almost implied that I insufficiently valued the opportunity of seeing Miss Monck; whereas this was in truth most interesting to me.

"I take blame to myself that there should have been anything like want of candour in your reception and treatment here, Mr. Nightingale. I felt all along that you were not being fairly dealt with. I wished that you should have known the truth from the first. But I yielded to one of greater experience. He was mistaken. I thought so then. I am confident of it now. Still he did it for the best. I cannot censure him. I owe him deep gratitude. To his unceasing care and kindness and fidelity I am heavily indebted. He has aided and

comforted me in a time of very great trouble. A truer friend never existed."

Again her voice trembled, and it seemed to me that her large, dark grey eyes were glistening with tears. She bowed her head, supporting it by one of her thin supple hands, as she leaned forward upon her desk. Her face struck me as exquisitely sensitive. It was partly in shadow now, the light falling sideways upon her glossy, silken hair, and clear brow, and small pink shell-like ear, from which a tiny ring depended. Yet I noted that her every passing emotion found expression in her pale, and even somewhat worn countenance. Just as a secluded lake, for all it seems so peaceful, and motionless, and sheltered, reflects now blue sky, and now sombre clouds, and now is rippled into frowns by the breath of the wind.

"I am speaking of old Mr. Vickery, for many, many years my father's devoted servant and most steadfast friend. His great kindness to me I can never forget, can never repay, can never sufficiently acknowledge."

It was new to me to hear the old man spoken of in this way. I felt that I had much underrated old Vickery—that I had done him great injustice.

"My father is ill, very seriously ill." As she

spoke a tear fell on the papers before her. "He has not been himself for a long time past. He is able to see no one; he can do little or nothing. It tries him severely to sign his name, even to the few papers and letters that cannot otherwise be issued from his office. I trust he may recover. But I have hoped so long now that my heart is grown worn and weary with waiting and hoping—in vain, in vain! Yet I do not despair. I hope, and wait, and pray still, and my faith in Heaven's mercy does not waver. When your coming here was first proposed, Mr. Nightingale, my poor invalid was not nearly so ill as he is now. There scarcely seemed injustice in his undertaking—I should say, perhaps, in our undertaking on his behalf—to receive you as his pupil, and to do all that might be done to enable you to perfect yourself in your profession. That, at least, was Vickery's opinion. But I see now it was not right, it was unfair to you."

She paused. I felt that I ought to say something. But my surprise, my confusion, let me add, also, my pity for her did not permit me to speak. I could only move uneasily in my chair, trusting that sympathy might be sufficiently expressed by my looks.

"I must go on," she said. "Plain words are

best. We were tempted by the amount of the premium to be paid by your relations. In truth, we are very poor. The sum was much needed by us. We coveted it, and we sinned in taking it. You may believe how much it pains me to make this confession. But it is right that I should make it. Already my heart is the lighter for having made it."

She covered her face with her hands. Her tears were now falling fast.

"Pray, Miss Monck," I said, finding speech at last, in an abrupt and rather bungling way, "do not think so seriously of so poor a matter. No sort of injustice has been done. You judge yourself far too severely. I have nothing whatever to complain of. I am only deeply sorry for Mr. Monck's ailing state. I fervently trust, with you, that he may be speedily restored to health. Pray do not let this matter touching myself trouble you further. I am grateful to you that you have had confidence in me, and spoken to me as you have spoken."

"I wish I had told you all before. You are most kind, Mr. Nightingale. But—there are others to be thought of. Will your relations approve of this arrangement when they know all?—and you are bound to tell them. I had this to propose.

That if you, if they so willed, your articles should be cancelled or transferred, and your premium should be returned—not all at once. That, I have it not in my power to offer. But by degrees, a little at a time, perhaps a very little. Still, that it should all be paid, to the last farthing, I pledge myself, though I work my fingers to the bone. I would not be dishonest, though I fear I may have seemed so.”

I could not listen to this proposal; it pained me too much. I said that, in any case, there should be no paying back, or talk of such a thing. I assured her that I was perfectly content. That I had no reason whatever to complain; that she had none for self-accusation. That, under the supervision of Vickery, I was really getting on with my profession; that I was advancing and learning more and more every day. (It was not absolutely true, but, seeing her distress, I could not be cramped by accuracy.) That Mr. Monck’s illness, deeply as I regretted it, was no real hindrance to my position as his clerk. Finally, I implored her to command my services in any way, and to make certain that I did not lack willingness to prove my sympathy, and to be of use to her if she would but show me how.

She thanked me again and again, smiling through

her tears, I think, at the hurry, and perhaps the clumsiness, of my address. But she knew, she could not but know; that, in intention, it was thoroughly earnest and sincere. Upon my entreaty, she consented, with some hesitation, that things should remain as they were—for the present, at any rate—in the hope that Mr. Monck's health might amend, and that meanwhile I should continue under the supervision of Vickery. I promised that I would spare no pains to content him and her. She was apparently pleased by my speech, as, indeed, I hoped that she would be.

"You are a kind friend, Mr. Nightingale," she said, as she again gave me her hand. "Pray believe that I am sincerely grateful."

"I may see you again, Miss Monck?"

"Indeed I hope so." This, and the sweet grace with which it was said, stirred my heart strangely.

"One moment," she continued, as I moved towards the door, for I had no excuse to remain longer. Gladly I returned to her side. "It's but a trifle; but Vickery was so anxious that I should speak to you on the subject. He is distressed about your handwriting."

"I fear it is very defective. I find a law hand so difficult to acquire."

"Not so very difficult if you take pains."

"I do try, I assure you, Miss Monck. And I will try more than ever now."

"That's right. Practice is necessary, of course. Vickery, perhaps, is too exacting."

"If I could only write like that. But I never shall!" I pointed to a document on the desk before her. It was written in the perfect clerkly hand Vickery had so much admired, and had bidden me imitate.

"Oh, but you will. That's my writing." She smiled and blushed as she spoke.

The mystery was explained then. Rachel Monck was the secluded copying clerk. She had written the letters received at the Down Farm, and the many papers I had noted in the office. I glanced at her small taper fingers; there was not a speck of ink upon them. But I perceived that she wore over the sleeves of her dress loose cuffs of black calico, such as I had seen copying clerks assume in lawyers' offices and at law stationers'.

"It is a beautiful hand," I said. Unconsciously my gaze wandered from the paper to her fingers. But she did not observe this.

"No, it's not beautiful," she said, simply. "But it's regular, neat, and legible. It has an

official and business-like look; and it's not really difficult, though it took me some little time to learn. It is so different to the writing I was taught at school. But Vickery gave me lessons. He is quite proud of his pupil now. He calls me the best copying clerk in London. But he only says that to cheer me."

She laughed pleasantly. It was wonderful how her face had brightened. I had thought her beautiful before, but she was to me still more beautiful now.

"You'll soon write quite as well—better, I'm sure, Mr. Nightingale."

In all she said and did there was a modest unconsciousness of meriting admiration, a graceful and tender humility that was singularly winning.

"If I can only write half as well I shall be satisfied. But you must find it very hard work, Miss Monck."

"No, indeed not. It's occupation. It doesn't try my mind too much, and yet it prevents me from giving way to painful thoughts. And then it's useful. I am helping my father. Really helping him, for if I did not do this some one must be paid to do it. It makes me happy to be of use to him. And I have to be so much alone, or watching by

his bedside, for hours and hours together, day and night. But I can watch and write too. It was hard at first, perhaps, but it comes easy to me now. I would not give it up on any account. A woman, a girl, placed as I am, can do so little that's useful, really useful—in the way of earning money, I mean. But I talk too much of myself. There was one thing more I had to say."

I listened eagerly. Content, so far as I was concerned, that she should go on talking upon any subject. It was delightful to hear her, to look upon her.

She hesitated, turned from me to the window, pressed her hand upon her forehead, came back to her desk, and then said hurriedly:

"You know my cousin, I think: Mr. Wray—Tony Wray. You are his friend?"

I said, Yes. Tony was my dearest, my most intimate friend.

"You will be his kind, true friend, I'm sure. Besides my father, he is my only living relation. Naturally, he is very dear to me, and to my father. Pray take care of him. He is negligent of himself. He has lost both parents—both died young; and my poor boy—I always call him so, for I am to him as an elder sister—we have known each other from

childhood—my poor boy is very delicate. I feel that he needs constant watching. He is light-hearted and careless, irresolute and unsteady, perhaps—though quite in a harmless way—unsuspicious, easily led by a stronger mind than his own. Protect him, Mr. Nightingale—against himself. He should keep early hours, avoid over fatigue, breathe pure air. He fancies himself stronger than he is. Be a true friend and brother to him, Mr. Nightingale, for his own sake, if not for mine. Indeed, to me you have shown kindness enough already. I dare not ask for more. Yet this you will do, knowing now what perhaps you did not know before—for Tony's sake, for your own, as his true friend. He speaks of you in the highest terms. I am sure they are deserved."

There was an earnest, almost a passionate throb in her voice. I promised all she asked, and, as I took leave of her, pressed her hand to my lips. It was as though I had solemnly pledged myself to keep my word and sworn fealty to her.

As I descended the stairs, two things became clear to me. Rachel Monck loved Tony Wray. And I was in love with my master's daughter. Or if not absolutely in love, I was on the brink of it, and could not but go forward and fall in.

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR RACHEL.

As I re-entered the office down-stairs, Vickery, without lifting his eyes from the papers before him, held up his hand, as though warning me not to approach him. There was a frown upon his forehead, due possibly to the intentness of his study; but I ascribed it to his disapproval of my admission to the upper chambers of the house and my interview with Miss Monck.

“Don’t speak, don’t interrupt me,” he said presently. “I’m busy with these accounts for the Master’s Office. Two and five and ten and four” —he continued to add up a long column of figures in a gasping sort of manner.

When at last he paused to take a pinch of snuff, I felt that I might fairly address him.

“I’ve had the pleasure of seeing Miss Monck,” I said.

"Precisely."

"For the first time."

"It may be the only one. However, you've seen a most admirable and exemplary young lady, Mr. Nightingale." He seemed impelled unconsciously, or in spite of himself, to render this homage to Rachel.

"She spoke of you in the highest terms, Mr. Vickery." He looked pleased, though he took to scowling immediately afterwards.

"She's very kind—she's too kind. But we need say nothing more about that, Mr. Nightingale. If you've finished that brief copy you've been engaged upon so long, I shall be happy to find you further occupation. There's plenty to do in this office, I can assure you, plenty to do; that is, supposing"—he hesitated.

"Supposing that I remain here? Of course, I remain here."

"Precisely. It was not by my advice the option was given you; but as it has been given you, and you've decided——"

"Quite decided."

"We need say no more about it then. Only it may be well for you to bear in mind that all that was said to you was strictly confidential. You will

please to regard it in that light, Mr. Nightingale."

"Of course."

"You will show that you can keep a secret. No man can hope to be a lawyer who can't keep a secret. And you will not attempt to see Miss Monck again. Nor to go up-stairs unless you are specially requested so to do."

"For what do you take me, Mr. Vickery?" I asked rather warmly. "Can you suppose me capable of conduct so disgraceful? I shall see Miss Monck only when she expresses a wish to see me."

"Precisely. That is what I intended to convey. I meant no offence, Mr. Nightingale."

"Meantime I shall strive hard to write as well as Miss Monck does; without any hope of succeeding, however."

He said nothing, but by a petulant movement of his head, I judged him to be ill-pleased that I had been informed as to Rachel's labours as a copying-clerk. We had no further conversation on the subject. It seemed to me that he was like a miser who had been compelled to disburse. Certain of the secrets and mysteries he hoarded had been torn from him and disclosed, in spite of all

his efforts to the contrary. He was angry and indignant that I now shared, although in a small degree, his knowledge of matters he had hoped to keep concealed. In fact, he was jealous and distrustful of me.

I certainly bore the old man no ill-will, however. Rachel Monck's high praise of him was still fresh in my memory. His advice had been adverse to my interests, and I could not but see that in so recklessly securing the premium paid upon my being articulated, he was open to the charge of disingenuous dealing. Yet she had commended warmly his kindness and fidelity. On that score he deserved to be forgiven much more than his sins against me, if, indeed, they could properly be rated as sins.

I longed to see Tony; to inform him of all that had happened. But, greatly to my disappointment, he was for some days absent from our rendezvous in Rupert-street, nor could I find him at his chambers. I had become now so accustomed to intimate communication with him, that I was really grieved at his non-appearance.

I had something to occupy my thoughts, however. I was continually reflecting upon, and rehearsing my interview with Rachel. I wished

over and over again that I had more fully availed myself of the opportunity, and expressed with greater force and eloquence my deep sympathy with her, my sorrow for her father's unfortunate condition, my desire to assist and comfort her to the utmost of my power. It was distressing to me to think of her severe trials and troubles; so young and fair as she was, shut up in that gloomy house in close attendance upon a sick man, an almost helpless invalid as it seemed, and her only relief from anxiety and watching, the drudgery of copying the dreariest of law papers.

And then it was plain that poverty was beginning to vex and wound her. She had frankly confessed as much. My premium had been pounced upon and expended. She had protested against this proceeding, but had been overruled by Vickery; perhaps also by necessity. How was this to end? To think of her suffering from want, absolute want! And it might come to that.

What could I do to help her? I meditated sending her anonymously all the money I possessed. Would she suspect, discover me? It might be so; and then I felt that she would have just cause to be indignant at my conduct, to deem herself insulted, injured. Moreover, I

found, when I came to examine my resources, that I had very little money to send.

Once I thought of writing to my uncle and applying for a loan of considerable amount, with a view to its transmission to Rachel. But I knew that he would require, that he would be entitled to, explanations. Could I offer any? Was I at liberty to reveal all or anything that she had avowed to me? It was true that she had not pledged me to secrecy; but I was not the less bound to respect her confidence. I had promised as much to Vickery. Besides, what right had I to interfere in the matter?

I had no right except such as my love for her might confer upon me. And as yet, even to myself, I hardly dared to confess this love. For very shame I could not. Why, but a little while back I had believed myself devotedly attached to Rosetta! Had I no reason to mistrust my sentiments, my impulses? Was I not absurdly susceptible, and weak and tickle as well? Before, I had admired and deemed I loved. It was different now. But I was moved by pity, perhaps, and was mistaking that also for love. I was very young, that was the plain truth of it, and knew very little—certainly not my own heart.

Yet how fondly I thought of her, of her beauty, her intelligence, her exquisite sweetness of look, of speech, of bearing, her modest goodness! How devoted she was to her father! By what a spirit of self-sacrifice she was possessed! And all she did was so simply done, so absolutely without consciousness or assumption—gravely and gracefully, as a matter of course, without aim at applause of any kind or even recognition—asking rather for non-recognition: a heroine without knowing it, an angel sublimely forgetful of her divinity.

It was thus I thought of Rachel Monck, finding curious pleasure in making her the theme of many rhapsodical reveries. The while a certain fear, nay, a conviction, haunted and depressed my imaginings. She loved, not me, but her cousin, Tony Wray.

He appeared at last in Rupert-street. He looked somewhat pale and harassed, I thought. But I was greatly pleased to see him again.

"I've missed you somehow these last few days, old fellow," he said. "I couldn't well help it. I've a lot of things I want to talk to you about."

I was vexed at the time, I remember. I desired to speak to him of myself. But he was

hardly in the mood for patient listening to me on that subject. He was bent upon talking about himself. I felt that I could not pour my cherished confessions into reluctant ears. So I sat silent and unsympathetic—even ruffled somewhat. But Tony, happily, did not perceive this.

“How are you?” he said. “It seems quite an age since we met.” (It was four days.) “It’s quite a comfort to get back to this place. I’ve been busy, that’s the fact. Earning money, or trying to. I didn’t want to mention the subject until I’d made a start. The truth is, you must know, I’ve been getting rather hard-up of late. That was one reason, not the only one, for I hold you accountable in part, why I gave up that lodging of mine in the Vale of Health. You see, my uncle, Mr. Monck”—he stopped a moment, then asked hurriedly: “By-the-bye, did I ever tell you, or do you know, that he’s very ill, a great invalid, and has been so this long time past?”

“You’ve never told me, but I happen to know it.” Then I added, by way, perhaps, of interjecting a fragment of the story I had to narrate: “Miss Monck told me.”

“Ah, to be sure, Rachel told you. Yes, of course, I’d forgotten; you’ve seen Rachel.” He

knew it already then; my story had been anticipated, undermined. "Yes, Mr. Monck's been ill, seriously ill, for a long time past. I fear there's no chance of his recovery."

"You fear that, Tony?"

"My dear fellow, I may almost say I'm sure, if one ever can be sure in such a case."

"Poor Rachel!" I thought.

"Well, in his state, of course, I haven't cared to trouble him about the interest on the trust money, he's bound as my guardian—I think I did tell you all that before—to pay to me every quarter. I couldn't press him, you know, and so the matter's fallen into arrear. Between ourselves I may tell you this, as you know so much already; my poor uncle, what with his severe illness, and one thing and another, has let his affairs fall into sad confusion, or perhaps I may say they've fallen into confusion almost of themselves, and in any case he couldn't well have helped it. In fact he's hard-up, and that's the occasion of *my* being hard-up. Rachel has trouble enough to keep things going. She's helped me, as far as she could, with a little money on account, now and then; but I felt it cruel to be taking it from her, knowing what pressing need she had for it."

"Quite right, Tony. I'm glad to hear you say that. But it is only like yourself."

"I'm pleased you see it in that light, old fellow. It's what you would have done yourself in like case."

"Indeed, I trust so, Tony; I feel sure of it. Anything I could do to help——" I checked myself, for I felt my speech was growing imprudently excited.

"We're of one mind about it, I see. Well, to avoid taxing Rachel, poor child, I looked about to see if I couldn't earn a trifle for myself, for the first time in my life. I'm not extravagant, you know; I've very few debts. A good sum was handed to me just about the time you first came to London" ("My premium," I thought), "and I then settled a good many outstanding bills. But it's wonderful how difficult it is to earn ever so little money; and without some money, you know, there's no getting on at all. The fact is, I've begun two or three professions, generally considered to be of a lucrative kind; but somehow I've never carried them on to what I may call the money-making point. Law and medicine were, of course, out of the question; I'm not a qualified practitioner in either of those walks; and when I

tried to turn my art to account—I didn't attempt to sell my poetry, I'm not quite a fool, or without a certain sense of humour; but with my art I did think there was something to be done—would you believe it?—not a soul would look at my sketches or put a price on them, even to the amount of two-pence-halfpenny. I'm boring you, I fear, but I haven't much more to say. I did find something to do at last; it's very humble, and the pay is ridiculously small in proportion to the labour. You'll never guess what it is. I colour plates for a fashionable milliner's magazine—ladies in pink bonnets, with a dab of carmine on their cheeks, in green silk dresses, with fringed parasols and streaks of dead gold to mark out their chains, ear-rings, and necklaces—you know the sort of thing? Well, that's what I'm doing now, and making money by it: a very, very little. Yet you can't think, taking it altogether, what a comfort the thing is to me. In my joy I'm almost tempted to be extravagant and order a pint of wine, to be paid for out of the first money I've ever earned in my life. The very first! Think of that, Master Duke, and envy, or at any rate congratulate me!"

I did congratulate him, as he seemed to wish it; but I felt that for one who had entertained

such lofty aspirations, who had dreamt of becoming President of the Royal Academy, and living in Cavendish-square, this colouring of fashion plates for the milliner's magazine ("La Mode," it was called) was rather inferior occupation, by no means to be preferred, indeed, as a question of art, to Mauleverer's craft of cutting out black-shade portraits. Tony perhaps read my thoughts.

"It isn't much, I know, old fellow," he said. "But then it's a beginning; that's how it should be looked at. And unlike my other beginnings it brings in a little money, just enough to keep me going for awhile till I can do something better. Besides, you know, 'needs must when the devil drives;' and the devil, in these cases, I take it, always stands for poverty. Perhaps altogether as diabolical a thing as could be wished. Now about this pint of wine."

But, of course, I would not hear of his dissipating his first earnings in this extravagant way, and I enjoined him to take care of himself, to avoid over-fatigue, and to let me help him in his new labours so far as I could. I said I could easily learn how to colour the plates, and I promised to rise early, so as to have some hours' work at them by daylight before breakfast every morning. More-

over, I implored him when he wanted money to borrow of me, pledging myself to assist him in this respect to the utmost of my means.

"What a good fellow you are, Duke," he said, with a tremble in his voice. "I'm sure I've done nothing to deserve this. But that only makes your kindness all the greater. Still, you know, I couldn't let you work in the way you propose, and take the money which would properly be due to you. That wouldn't be fair at all. But I see how it is. Rachel's been talking to you about me."

I felt rather guilty. Was my kindness to Tony due simply to my love for Rachel? Surely not altogether. Yet in part it was, perhaps. Nevertheless my regard for Tony was genuine enough. I believed myself capable of real sacrifices on his account. Only, when Love and Friendship ride together upon one horse, it is quite certain that Friendship has to accept the inferior situation and ride behind. I would do much for Tony. Yet I now knew that I would do much more for Rachel.

But he was quite unconscious of my love for his cousin.

"Rachel is a good little girl—the best of girls. But she's over-anxious. Poor child! Perhaps circumstances have made her so. She worries herself

about me ; indeed, I may say she worries me about myself. I know I am not particularly strong ; I never was. Neither in body nor in mind perhaps. But she'd make me out to be much worse than I really am. I can take care of myself, and I do. I can't bear to be always coddled and cosseted, and wrapped up in cotton wool, as though I were a sick child, or made of glass. But that's poor Rachel's way. She's always looking after me and taking charge of me, and calling herself my elder sister, which is rather absurd, because, as it happens, I'm a year or two older than she is."

It was plain he did not love Rachel. Loving her he could not have spoken of her in this way. It was cruel of him, I thought. No wonder there was a sad look in her face. No wonder her tears were so prompt to fall.

"But you saw Rachel ; what did you think of her, Duke ?"

"I thought her very beautiful."

"No, no, not beautiful. Rachel's not a beauty. But she's certainly nice-looking." It was very clear that he did not love her.

"I don't think I care much for brunettes," he went on. "I like blondes best ; golden-haired creatures, with deep blue eyes, cherry lips, and

exquisite rose and pearl-tinted transparent complexions. That's my notion of beauty. Loveliness of colour. All the best paints on one's palette go to the portraying of a blonde beauty. But one doesn't often see a really perfect blonde; or, indeed, anything really perfect. Rachel's a pretty figure; her movements are all graceful."

"Most graceful," I couldn't help interjecting.

"You noticed that? Her head's well set on her shoulders too; she carries herself finely, like a little queen. And her hands are very pretty. Yes, altogether she's certainly nice looking. But not a beauty, to my thinking. I can't allow that."

I disliked his calm, critical, connoisseur way of speaking of his cousin, though it was really, without doubt, harmless enough. It jarred, however, with the tenderness of my sentiments, with the staunchness of my convictions. In my eyes Rachel was perfection. Yet it was pleasant, too, to constitute her the topic of our conversation; to hear her name mentioned; to have her praises sounded even in Tony's apathetic way; the while he was quite unsuspecting of the state of my heart.

"And, beautiful or not, she's thoroughly good and true."

"I'm confident of that."

"A better, I'll say a nobler, little woman never trod the earth. Poor child, she's been sorely tried: but she bears it all with the noblest courage. I honour and respect her greatly."

"I'm sure she is deserving of your highest praises, Tony; of universal esteem."

"I'm so glad you think with me, old fellow. That's one more subject of sympathy and agreement between us. Though, of course, I could hardly have expected that you would rate her as highly as I do, because I'm her cousin, and have known her as long as I can remember anything, and you have seen her but once, as I understand. But it seems you made a favourable impression upon her."

"I did? She spoke of me? What did she say? Tell me, Tony."

"How excited you are. One would think you were in love with poor Rachel. But that would be too absurd."

"Yes, too absurd. What did she say?"

"Well, not much. And I'm not sure of the precise words. But I think she said that she thought Mr. Nightingale was a gentlemanly young man—something to that effect."

It certainly wasn't much, and was, in a measure, disappointing. Still it was something.

"Girls, you know, are not very outspoken. I said it was nonsense talking about gentlemanly young men; that you were my friend, and a first-rate fellow. I gave her a good account of you, you may be sure."

I could have hugged him.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE PLAY.

It was about this time, I remember, that I suddenly encountered my old tutor, and—I am doubtful whether I should add “my old friend” or “my old enemy”—Mr. Bygrave. In any case my disposition towards him was certainly of a friendly kind, when I saw him again after so long an interval of separation. And then he was no longer my preceptor—I was no longer his pupil. We met now upon a different footing—upon equal terms. I had been to Doctors’ Commons upon some official errand. I found him wandering about St. Paul’s Churchyard—for he knew little of London—in quest of the Chapter Coffee House. He had, as he subsequently explained, an appointment there with the agent or representative of a scholastic establishment in the North that stood in need of a classical master. Mr. Bygrave had answered an advertisement, and had

been duly summoned to attend, armed with such certificates as he could furnish of his qualifications for the post.

In appearance he was little changed, except that his thin whiskers were now somewhat grizzled, and his old gaunt hungry look seemed to have gained force. He was not, I judged, in very prosperous circumstances. Indeed, he revealed to me that he had been for some time without permanent occupation. He had held curacies in various districts, but only for brief periods. He confessed that he had not won the favour of his rectors, nor of his congregations. I found this credible enough. Even at Purrington—a most uncritical parish—Mr. Bygrave had not been popular.

I knew him at once; but I had great difficulty in persuading him of my identity. He viewed me with extreme suspicion. I think that for some time he took me for a pickpocket bent upon nefarious objects, or a member of the swell-mob—if indeed he had ever heard of that mysterious body.

“You’re not Duke Nightingale,” he said simply. “He was a mere child.”

I had to explain to him that time was ever a-flying, and that children gradually grew up—as a rule. Still he doubted.

"They'll be glad to hear at the Down Farm—my mother and my uncle, I mean—that you're well, Mr. Bygrave."

"Ah, yes. The Down Farm—at Purrington. Your mother and uncle—of course. Mrs. Nightingale and Mr. Orme. They were always very kind to me. I trust they're well. Yes, I remember them. And you're Duke, you say?"

He did not believe me, it was clear.

I asked him to dine with me in Rupert-street, appointing the hour. He consented, upon my urging him, though he was greatly perplexed at the proposition. I reminded him of the studies I had pursued under his guidance. I told him I still possessed and cherished—which last was not strictly true, at any rate I had not looked into it for months—the pocket Horace with manuscript annotations he had given me on his quitting Purrington. Still he was incredulous.

He promised to come to dinner, however, and I induced him to write down in his pocket-book the place and the hour of meeting. That done, I conducted him to the Chapter Coffee House, which I felt sure he would never have discovered for himself, and there left him in the custody of a waiter.

I perceived with some little surprise that the

measure of awe and reverence with which, as a boy, I had once regarded Mr. Bygrave had diminished even to vanishing. I could scarcely credit that I now stood in no fear whatever of his disapproval; that he seemed to need my assistance rather than I his; that, indeed, wandering, lank, wan, and bewildered in St. Paul's Churchyard, he presented a figure appealing strongly to my sense of the ridiculous. And yet I found that I liked him now better than I did. He was associated with my early home-life, and in such wise was deserving of toleration and even kindness at my hands. That was my coxcombical view of our relative positions.

He was half an hour late in presenting himself in Rupert-street. He had lost his way, it appeared, and strayed almost as far as Hyde Park. I introduced him to Tony—whose attendance I had taken precautions to secure—and set before him as ample a dinner as our favourite establishment could provide. I was glad to find that Mr. Bygrave's appetite was in excellent preservation. He ate with great avidity. His quick clearing of the dishes reminded me of his visits of old to the Down Farm, when my mother was wont to insist that the curate was starved in his Purrington lodgings. He mentioned, by way of excuse for

his ravenousness, that he had eaten nothing since breakfast time.

He was, for him, in high spirits, which perhaps bore considerable resemblance to the depression of other people. He had, it seemed, obtained a promise of the appointment as classical master at the northern school. But he was far from talkative. With a young host's redundant bountifulness I filled his glass repeatedly. The wine flushed his pale, pinched cheeks a little, but did not much loosen his tongue.

Tony, I could see, was at first greatly amused. "It's quite a treat," he whispered me, "to see any one at once so learned, so dull, and so hungry." But the dinner was not very lively altogether. As a festive entertainment it might even be counted a failure. Somehow, sympathy failed to find a place at the board. It was not only that he was a man, and that we were comparatively boys. Mr. Bygrave retained his old inability to converse. He would rise to no topical bait, though our angling did not lack painstaking and good intentions. Even Tony's most zealous efforts were of no avail. My guest's appetite appeased, he sat dumb: exactly as I so well remembered his sitting, years back, in the little parlour of the farm-house. Yet his dumbness

did not disconcert him. He was quite content to be speechless, being assured, possibly, that his subjects of discourse were ill-suited to us, as ours to him.

He was as a library of which we did not possess the key, and which perhaps contained books we did not at that moment care to study, however excellent and precious they might be. In a state of desperation I proposed at last that we should adjourn from the dinner-table to the pit of Drury Lane. Mr. Bygrave, almost to my surprise, consented. He said that he had not been to the play since his undergraduate days. I thought this looked promising. Tony brightened; he had been rapidly sinking into a despondent state.

As host I paid for our admissions, overruling all Tony's objections to that proceeding. Mr. Bygrave was not, I think, aware that payment was necessary before entering a theatre.

I called his attention to the vast size, and fine proportions of the house. He inquired how many people it held. I said between three and four thousand, probably.

"The Athenian theatre must have held between thirty and forty thousand," he observed. It was obvious that he did not think much of Drury Lane.

"They could not have heard or seen much on the back benches," Tony remarked.

Mr. Bygrave explained to him how the cothurnus added to the stature of the actors, while their flowing draperies enhanced the importance of their aspect; how they wore masks contrived to swell the intonations of the voice; and how brazen vessels were ingeniously disposed about the theatre to increase the volume of sound. He had not a doubt that all could see and hear perfectly; even the occupants of the back benches.

"Then it must have been terribly noisy for those in the front row," said Tony, affecting a remarkable air of innocence, which completely deceived me until I found him winking at me behind Mr. Bygrave's back. The suggestion that the representations upon the classic stage could be fairly described as noisy was not agreeable to Mr. Bygrave. He shook his head, but he did not pursue the subject further.

The play was *The Stranger*. I could have wished for a more animated entertainment.

"The actors still wear masks in pantomimes," continued Tony.

"Then I should have preferred a pantomime to-night," said Mr. Bygrave, simply.

"We don't find them very audible, though, when they speak in masks."

"The art of constructing masks is probably lost," said Mr. Bygrave, "with many other admirable inventions of the ancients. They were made of wood——"

"They make them now of pasteboard," interposed Tony.

"That accounts for it, probably. The old system was far preferable. The masks were made of wood, encrusted, as Pliny tells us, in the first instance with thin plates of brass, but subsequently, it would seem, with portions of the stone called calcaponos, or brass-sounding. By these means the voice issuing from the mask acquired extraordinary volume and sonority. They were of extreme beauty—aggrandised and idealised faces of the noblest Grecian form. They must have been wonderfully imposing."

"But rather heavy for the actors to wear. As it is, the poor fellows suffer terribly with their pasteboard heads in the pantomime. What they'd do if their masks were made of wood, and brass, and stone, I can't think."

"The Greeks were a superior race," said Mr. Bygrave. And then he inquired of me whether

Kotzebue, whose name he had not before met with, was highly considered as a dramatist.

I informed him that the playwright had enjoyed at one time exceeding popularity; that his works, which were very numerous, had been translated into every European language, and been universally esteemed for their moving and pathetic character. But still I thought it was now generally held that Kotzebue's merits had been overvalued, and that his plays were in truth but tedious and dull productions. Upon the subject of their morality I did not think it worth while to enter. Mr. Bygrave was a clergyman, and could judge of that matter for himself at his leisure.

"The Stranger wants action," I said, with a critical air.

"I can't say I agree with you," he replied. "It seems to me that there is too much action. There is want of repose, indeed. In the Greek drama there was no action. Deeds of violence—such as murder—were banished from the Greek theatre, not because, as some suppose, they were too shocking for representation, but because they were action. All *that* should take place, or should be supposed to take place, away from the spec-

tator's presence. On the stage there should be absolute repose."

"No passion?"

"Not in its violent stage. Suffering may be exhibited; but not sudden conflicts of emotions. The play is divided into acts expressly that action may be supposed to go on, and time elapse in the intervals."

I felt that Mr. Bygrave would not be a sympathetic or appreciative critic of my tragedy of *The Daughter of the Doge*.

Altogether, our visit to the theatre was not very successful, except in that it had extorted a measure of speech from Mr. Bygrave. But Tony at last declared to me in a whisper that my friend's speech was more trying than his silence, and leant back and went to sleep. Mr. Bygrave continued his remarks upon the entertainment with repeated reference to the characteristics of the classical theatre. He agreed that the language of the play was too prosy, colloquial, and common-place. The drama, he maintained, should have its own peculiar phraseology. Solemn, massy, remote from ordinary use, exalted, almost archaic. And he found grave fault with the players. They were too restless, and they grimaced overmuch. He would have had

them still and expressionless ; and thereupon he returned to the advantages of masks. They concealed natural irregularities and defects ; substituting an unchanging perfectness of contour. They varied according to the characters represented. The face of Niobe was intensely mournful ; Medea's announced her vengefulness ; valour was depicted on the mask of Hercules ; on that of Ajax, transport and fury. How portray change of feeling, did I ask ? It was not needed. Or the actor could avert his face, or muffle it in his robe. What could be more awfully impressive ? Of the chorus, and of its solemn office to point the moral of the scenes enacted, and to guide and interpret the sympathies of the audience, he had much to say. He regretted that no chorus had appeared in the *Stranger*. He had looked, he said, for its rich, passionate, and religious music, accompanied by its solemn and symbolic dances—the strophe and the antistrophe—full of mysterious and inscrutable meaning.

“Danced, did they ?” said Tony, waking up. “The chorus does that in *Macbeth*. It always strikes me as rather comical.”

Abruptly, Mr. Bygrave concluded his instructive observations.

“It was all very clever and improving, no

doubt," Tony remarked to me afterwards; "but you know, old fellow, we didn't go to Drury Lane to hear that. The Stranger wasn't very cheerful, but as for your friend—well, he's your friend, and a very good fellow of course—so I'll say no more about him."

"And you're little Duke Nightingale!" said Mr. Bygrave, as I parted from him under the shadow of Drury Lane's portico. He was still unconvinced of my identity.

I never saw him again. He died some years later, as I heard, of small-pox, which had broken out furiously in the school in the North. Poor Bygrave! He declined to avail himself of the opportunity for escape which was proffered him, and remained at his post tending his pupils to the utmost of his power, until he was himself stricken down. A tablet to his memory was placed upon the wall of the district church. The inscription was in English: a fact to be regretted perhaps. He would so much have preferred Greek. But in that case his merits and his sad fate would not have been made known to nearly so many. Poor Bygrave!

Arrived at my lodgings, certainly sober enough, after the first entertainment I had ever given in the

nature of a dinner-party, I turned to my pocket-book to ascertain of what funds I still stood possessed. A bank-note or two remained, I was glad to find.

Suddenly I discovered in an inner fold of the book a letter I had long overlooked.

It was the letter of which my uncle had spoken on the morning of my departure from home. I had forgotten all about it. Already it wore almost an old and faded look. It was sealed with black wax, and addressed to "Sir George Nightingale, Harley-street, Portland-place."

CHAPTER X.

SIR GEORGE.

I WAS surprised and vexed that this letter should have escaped my attention so completely. But my uncle had said little enough concerning it, and in the excitement of my quitting the country I had not particularly heeded his words. I had not even glanced at the address of the letter, but, allowing it to remain ensconced in a safe fold of my pocket-book, had straightway forgotten all about it. Was the matter of any importance? It could hardly be. No reference had ever been made to it in the many communications I had since received from the Down Farm.

Who was this Sir George Nightingale? A relation, of course—my uncle had said as much, I thought. But I had certainly never heard of him before. I decided that he must be a cousin of my late father's—cousin being a convenient term, com-

prehending various degrees of consanguinity. It had been deemed advisable that I should seek out this unknown kinsman and apprise him of my existence. He might not regard that information as of any worth; but on the other hand it was possible that he might exhibit a friendly disposition towards me.

Still it would be difficult to explain my negligence and delay in presenting the letter, which I took for granted was one of introduction. I consulted Tony upon the subject.

"Sir George Nightingale!" he exclaimed. "A relation of yours—and you have never seen him yet, never even heard of him? How strange that seems! Why I thought that everybody had at any rate heard of Sir George. My dear fellow, Sir George is a very great personage."

The word "swell" was not in vogue at that date, or Tony would probably have employed it.

"And he's a relation of yours?"

"So I understand."

"To think of your having any doubt about it! Of course he's a relation of yours. That explains many things. Your love of art, for instance."

"Sir George is an artist then?"

"To be sure he is. He's serjeant-painter to the

king. He was knighted, I believe, at the last coronation. He's quite famous in his way—highly esteemed on all sides, especially by the world of fashion. He's a man of fashion himself. He is *the* portrait painter of the time. To be painted by Sir George is like presentation at court—evidence of gentility all the world over. He has the whole peerage at his beck and call. The most lovely women in the world crowd to him, imploring him to record their loveliness upon canvas—to bid their fleeting charms live for ever by the magic of his brush."

"A successful portrait painter?"

"Most successful. And you'd never heard of him! Your relation, and you've never seen him! Such is life. Such is fame. But a man is never a prophet among his own kinsfolk. I wonder the name never struck me before. But I thought of course you'd have mentioned so important a fact. Why Sir George can throw open the world of art to you. With his aid your success is assured, if you ever think of abandoning the law and taking up with art as a profession. With your talent for it, too! Sir George Nightingale! Art runs in your family. These things are in one's blood, you know, and they will out. I always hold that one's fore-

fathers are in the main responsible for one's follies, even for one's sins. And of course they should have credit for one's successes and good deeds. Origin is a mysterious thing. And it may lead to extraordinary and complicated results. I don't know much about my own family. My father was a doctor, however. What was yours?"

"I never heard. He died when I was very young. I never saw him that I can remember."

"Just my case. But I know that he was a doctor. Now possibly—I say possibly, because I'm not at all sure about the facts—possibly his father was a lawyer, and his father's father an artist. I won't carry it further back. But that would account for my being possessed, temporarily, with a disposition towards those three professions. And my ultimate choice of a vocation would thus depend less upon my own volition than upon the question as to whether the influence of my father, my grandfather, or my great-grandfather predominated in my nature. It's really an interesting inquiry. Then again the influence of the mother and her progenitors has to be taken into account. You see it's a wide subject."

"My mother was a farmer's daughter," I ob-

served, "but the fact didn't induce me to take very kindly to farming."

"Perhaps not. Still you did take to it for a time, and thought you liked it. That bears out my argument. My own case exactly. You were governed for a time by the influence, say, of your maternal grandfather. Then a stronger influence intervened, and you turned towards the law. It may be that your father was a lawyer. You say you don't know what he was. Why not a lawyer?"

"I think I should have heard of it if he'd been a lawyer."

"Depend upon it there's been a lawyer in your family at some time or other."

I could not gainsay this possibility.

"And now we have it for certain that a Nightingale, a relation of yours, your father's cousin, you suggest—and that connects them with a common ancestor—is an artist, really a famous artist. I wish I could feel equally certain that among my father's family, the Wrays, or my mother's family, the Moncks, there had ever been a painter so distinguished as Sir George Nightingale. I should hail it as a guarantee of my future success. I should look upon my fortune as made. Yours, my dear

Duke, I count quite as a matter of certainty from this time forth."

"But I'm not a painter yet, Tony."

"There's an element of doubt in the case, of course. Certainty is only a way of speaking. There's doubt in everything. To my thinking it's doubt and not love that makes the world go round. You're not a painter, as you say: meaning that you have not yet obtained universal recognition in that character. But that may come, or the world may some day acknowledge you to be the true poet and fine dramatist that I already know you to be. Or to go back to one of my original convictions—which I have not yet by any means abandoned—you may stick to the law and become Lord Chancellor. It will depend, as I said before, upon the influence brought to bear upon your nature by those concerned in your descent."

"But a man may strike out a line for himself, I suppose, which none of his ancestors had previously followed?"

"No doubt. Yes, I must grant you that. I must admit a phenomenal creature every now and then, though it's disturbing to my line of argument. For even if we trace back to Adam, *he* did not follow all the professions, though I have no doubt

that he was a thoroughly accomplished and well-informed man. And if you care to set up for being a phenomenal creature, my dear Duke, I won't say you nay. Indeed, I think you're fully entitled, better than any man I know, to be that sort of exceptional personage. But I see that I must alter my own ambition in some respect. Even if I'm President of the Academy when you're Lord Chancellor, I shall hardly be able to claim the privilege of painting your portrait. Your relation, Sir George, will have an absolute right to accomplish that. And he wouldn't be likely to forego it. In decency I could not ask him to."

"You think that I should go and see him?"

"Of course you'll go and see him. You can't question that. He'll be delighted to make your acquaintance. Who wouldn't? Take my word for it, my dear Duke, he'll be delighted."

"But this unfortunate delay——"

"What does it matter? An accident—easily explained. Besides, better late than never. It couldn't be helped. You've been busy—he's always busy——"

"He's rich, I suppose, Tony?"

"Rich? My dear fellow he coins money. Every stroke of his brush is like printing a bank-

note. He's the most prosperous portrait painter that ever lived."

"Tony," I said, after a pause, "I'll not go to him."

"Not go? Why not?"

"He's my relation, and I've never seen him, never heard his name mentioned until now. And he's successful and rich. If I go to him, to introduce myself to him, to tell him my name, and explain my situation, I shall seem as though I were asking for a share of his prosperity, imploring alms of him almost."

"Imploring alms? I never heard you say anything so illogical before. Nonsense. I'm sure you do Sir George, though I've never seen him, injustice—grave injustice. He'll be pleased to see you, proud of you, of course he will."

"But it's plain that all these years he has kept apart from me and my family."

"Why not? He's been living in London, and you have but lately quitted the country. How could you meet?"

"At any rate I'll write home first for instructions."

"Nonsense. Haven't they intrusted you with a letter to deliver to him? Your people at home

have long ago made up their minds that you're on intimate terms with Sir George by this time. As you should be ; as you will be."

"I'm sure they'd no notion that he was so famous and prosperous a man as you describe him."

"What difference does that make among relations—well, then, among artists? Art is a republic. Besides, you can but see him. You're bound to see him. If you don't like him there's no need to go near him again. Doesn't curiosity tempt you to see this great man? Thousands would jump at such an opportunity. He's famous, I tell you: the most distinguished portrait painter of the time. And this letter, it really belongs to him. You must deliver it. Really I never heard of such extraordinary scruples. My dear Duke, are you taking leave of your senses? Seeing Sir George will be an event in your life, a most precious experience. It may have almost an historical importance. Painters of the future may select the subject for illustration, and it would really compose and paint uncommonly well. 'First Introduction of Duke Nightingale to his kinsman, Sir George.' In my mind's eye I can see such a work hung upon the line at the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, and receiving extraordinary applause."

Of course, after this, there seemed no help for it. I went to Harley-street.

I found the house without difficulty. It was a stately, but rather sombre-looking mansion, with wide door-steps and entrance. Above the olive-green coloured double-doors, with scowling lion-headed knockers, rose an arch of twisted ironwork, converting the portal into a sort of metallic bower, with large extinguishers of a decorated pattern on either side, for the convenience of the linkmen, when such functionaries were in existence. A handsome yellow chariot with a purple hammercloth stood at the door.

I was admitted. Sir George was at home. I intrusted my letter to the care of a grave but polite servant wearing powder in his hair, and a dark livery with black silk stockings. I was ushered into the dining-room.

Presently the servant returned to say that Sir George would see me shortly, if I would kindly wait. Of course I would wait. I surveyed the room. It was handsomely but heavily furnished, and wore somehow a dusty and neglected look. Many pictures in massive frames hung upon the walls. I judged them to be works of the old masters—those vague patriarchs to whom so nume-

rous and unworthy a progeny has been attributed. But there was a deplorable absence of light; the windows were obscured by dense crimson hangings, and I could really see little of the paintings, except that they were very black and highly varnished.

It was a cheerless room, cold and grim, I thought, though really there was little fault that could be found with its fittings, which were, without doubt, costly enough. But it had an unused look, as I fancied. A dining-room in which no one ever dined.

“Sir George will see you, sir, in the studio, if you will kindly follow me,” said the footman, softly, and with a deferential air.

CHAPTER XI.

SERJEANT-PAINTER TO THE KING.

I WAS led up a broad and imposing flight of stairs. I noticed with regret that even on the soft carpet my boots creaked noisily—vulgarly, I thought. I envied the grave footman his silent, cat-like tread. I felt nervous and ill at ease—I scarcely knew why. But it occurred to me, I remember, that this servant of Sir George's was in bearing and appearance a much more refined, and polished, and graceful person than I was—his master's kinsman and visitor.

The footman quietly opened a door and bowed as I entered a large room lighted by one very high window that seemed to trench upon the floor above. It was a studio, handsomely furnished with much picturesque litter about it in the way of armour, tapestry, china, metal work, and other artistic paraphernalia.

"Turn that canvas to the wall, Propert, if you please," said in a polite tone a gentleman who was leaning against a high mantelpiece with his back towards me.

Propert, the servant, dexterously removed a large canvas from an easel standing in the centre of the room, and then, after a moment's pause, as though to make sure that his services were not further needed, noiselessly withdrew. I was left alone with the gentleman: Sir George Nightingale, as I could not doubt.

He was tall and slight, but of most shapely figure. I was struck by a certain grace of line that attended his every movement and posture. And his elegance of form was displayed to advantage in the court-dress he wore of silver-edged black velvet, with cut-steel buttons and sword hilt, and embroidered white satin waistcoat. There had been that morning, as I afterwards learnt, a levee or drawing-room, and Sir George had been in attendance upon the court. He was quite bald, but for a narrow fringe of iron-grey hair at the back of his head.

He held in his long white Vandyke looking hands the letter I had brought from the Down Farm. There were rings upon his taper fingers,

I noted, and rich ruffles of yellow lace round his wrists. He read the letter more than once as it appeared to me, or he was musing over it, and only seeming to read it. Presently, he turned to me.

"So you are young Mr. Nightingale." He spoke firmly and deliberately, but there was a most pleasant musical ring about his voice. "We have met before, I think, Mr. Nightingale?"

Then I recognised him. He was the defendant in Messrs. Dicker Brothers' action; he was the gentleman I had served with a writ, on the steps of the club-house in Pall Mall. I felt so confused and dismayed that I remained speechless.

"I see," he said, "you have not forgotten me." He folded up the letter and placed it upon the mantelpiece. He then took from his pocket, and lightly tapped, a gold snuff-box, with a jewel-framed oval miniature decorating its lid.

"I am very sorry, Sir George." I began in an awkward way an attempt at an apology.

"There is nothing to regret, Mr. Nightingale," he interposed. "You had a simple duty to perform. I can find no fault with your manner of performing it. It was not a pleasant duty."

"It was not, indeed," I murmured.

"It was pleasant to neither of us—it was the less pleasant to me. But I was alone to blame. I think I explained so much at the time. The matter had escaped me. It should not have escaped me. I can only plead my numerous engagements, the many calls upon my attention, the duties of my position. However, the thing is over now. So I am assured. I am to be troubled with no more writs on that account. That is your view of the case also, I may presume, Mr. Nightingale?"

"Yes, Sir George. The claim upon you has been discharged. There is an end of the matter altogether."

"That's well. We'll dismiss the thing from our minds then. And, if you please, we will date our acquaintance from our present meeting. I will only trust that you may not again have to serve me with a writ."

"I hope not, indeed, Sir George."

"That's well," he repeated. "And perhaps the fewer writs you serve upon others it will be the better for the world in general, the lawyers of course excepted. But we need not care for them. They care sufficiently for themselves. I beg your pardon, I forgot at the moment that you are to be

counted among them—a recruit of the unholy army of attorneys.”

He spoke pleasantly, and there was a kindly look in his bright dark eyes, which seemed to me to be almost of a bronze colour, with a certain metallic brilliancy in their sparkle as they caught and reflected the light; they were much shadowed, however, by his rather heavy brows and long thick lashes. His complexion was pallid, and his features sharply shaped and very handsome in their extreme regularity. There was the look of carved ivory about his colourless symmetrical face. I could not but admire him exceedingly. While yet I felt that for all his friendly air and agreeable talk there was something repellent in his smile. It was, I thought, cold and cynical; though not so in any pronounced degree. Still, I could not but suspect him of mocking me a little, and assuming towards me a cordiality of manner that was not wholly genuine. I was not certain of this, however. But I knew that we stood apart from each other somehow, and that he closely watched me the while he spoke, as though noting the effect upon me of his aspect and address. I could, indeed, scarcely sustain his observation of me, it was so persistent and searching, and yet I could hardly say that it was deficient in courtesy.

It was certainly very different to ordinary point-blank staring.

He took a pinch of snuff with an adroit air, but without any apparent enjoyment of it, as I judged, but rather as though he were complying merely with the dictates of fashion. The snuff fell, for the most part, upon his waistcoat, and was lightly brushed off by a dainty movement of his beautiful jewelled hand, which was thus very fully exhibited. But the action was accomplished without effort or show of consciousness.

"Young Mr. Nightingale," he said, musingly; and then he asked me how old I was. I told him.

"Is it possible!" he said; and his strongly marked eyebrows arched with surprise. "You have not been long in London, I suppose?"

I answered that I had left the country now some months, and went on to apologise for having so long delayed presenting him my letter of introduction. He took it from the mantelpiece.

"I had not observed the date," he said, carelessly. I could not but doubt the truth of this statement. He had certainly seemed to read every line of the letter most carefully. And I could not divest myself of the notion that his manner was rather unreal, that he was in some measure playing

a part; though with what object I could not conceive. "Yes I see; it should have been delivered months ago. You thought it of no importance probably." And he crumpled up the letter, thrusting it into his pocket.

I said that in truth I had completely forgotten it, and explained my receiving it from my uncle at the moment of my departure from home, and it's lying since hidden in my pocket-book.

"It is of no importance, no real importance, Mr. Nightingale. I refer, of course, to your delay in presenting it, not to the letter itself. I am happy to receive it. I am most pleased to see you. You have good news, I trust, from your relations at—the Down Farm, Purrington—that is the name of the place, I think? Yes. Your uncle, Mr. Orme, is well, I hope?"

"He is quite well."

"And your mother?"

"Quite well also, thank you, Sir George."

"I am glad to hear it. When you are writing to them you can—but that will not be necessary. You will write, of course, what you think proper. As I said, I am pleased to see you. I shall be happy to be of any service to you, should the opportunity of serving you ever present itself. It may or

may not. You bear the name of Nightingale. If only on that account, I am bound to show you such attention, such kindness even, as I may. But as yet I scarcely know what my power may be in that respect. Tell me : they spoke to you concerning me at your home, the Down Farm ? ”

“ No, Sir George.”

“ You rarely heard my name mentioned ? ”

“ Indeed, Sir George, I never once heard your name mentioned.”

“ It is not to be wondered at,” he said, after a pause. “ It is often so ; especially in England. The members of a family are parted by chance, by circumstances, quite as much as by choice. Town and the country are like distinct nations, engaged in different pursuits, forming different opinions, habits, and tastes, speaking a different language almost.”

It seemed to me that he was referring to a certain Purrington accent that I knew to be still traceable in my speech. He read my thoughts, and smiled.

“ Yes, you possess, I notice, something of a provincial accent, though I was far from alluding to that at the moment. But you may as well correct it if you can. Not that I object to it

myself. It reminds me of fresh air, and green fields, and bright flowers. But London prejudice, I know, holds country dialect, or any suspicion of it, somewhat in contempt. And living in London one must recognise its foibles and follies of all kinds. But the thing is but a trifle. And so you are a lawyer?"

"I'm but a student at present—a very young one."

"And this profession of the law—it was of your own choosing?"

"Well, I began to learn farming first, Sir George——"

"And you wearied of it? I am not surprised. Though doubtless farming has charms for many. And then it was proposed to you that you should become a lawyer. And you jumped at the plan. It offered you liberty, London, a new life, and escape from the country—from home. Isn't that so?"

I confessed that the case was much as he had stated it. He smiled graciously.

"Yes, there comes a time when home seems dull, especially a home miles away from town. Yet your home was a happy one, I suppose? You were kindly treated by your parents—I should say by your uncle and your mother?"

"Yes, indeed."

"I do not doubt it. But you were as Rasselas ; your home as the happy valley ; you longed to find a way out of it, for all its happiness. They were loth to part with you ?"

"Yes, I think so ; I am sure so. You do not think me ungrateful in quitting them as I did ?"

"I think your conduct perfectly natural. Very likely in your place I should have done as you did. Ingratitude is very natural, I think—at any rate in some measure. At a certain period of life home loses its magic and value ; it seems to mean restriction, confinement, apron-strings. It's not so much one's own home as one's father's and mother's. By-and-by, perhaps, the old appreciation of it returns, or memory invests it with a kind of fanciful and romantic worth. Or one establishes a home of one's own. But you, at your age, can hardly have dreamt of doing that. Where are you living ?"

I told him.

"Featherstone-buildings," he repeated, with an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders. "The Down Farm is your uncle's own property, I think : his freehold ?" he asked presently.

"Yes, the greater part of it. Certain of his land, however, he holds under lease from Lord Overbury."

"Lord Overbury. So I understood. And Mr. Orme is a bachelor still? He is not likely to marry now?"

"Not at all likely, I should say."

"Probably not. You must find it a great change from the farm to Featherstone-buildings. But it may be convenient for you. Mr. Monck is the name of the gentleman you are articted to? So I understood." He trifled with his snuff-box again. "Are you considered to be like your mother?"

"Not very like, I think."

"She was dark with black hair, if I remember rightly?"

"Her hair is almost white now."

"Indeed! But time flies so."

"You have seen my mother, Sir George?"

"Yes, I have seen her; many years since, however."

"You knew my father, perhaps."

"Yes, I knew your father."

"I regret that I cannot remember him," I said.

"You cannot, of course."

"I have seen his picture. A miniature in my mother's possession."

"I remember. There was a miniature of him. It was thought like him at the time it was painted. You are fond of pictures? You care for art? You draw yourself perhaps?"

"Yes, a little."

"You have studied? Under what master?"

"I had a few lessons, a very few, some time ago now, from a Mr. Mauleverer."

"Mauleverer? I don't know the name—in connexion with art."

"Fane Mauleverer."

"I know nothing of him."

"And from a Monsieur Dubois, a Frenchman, settled for a time in Steepleborough."

"You must show me your drawings. I should like to see if you possess any real ability for art. Pardon my rudeness. But art is my métier. The world is kind enough to think that I really know something about it. I may be able to help you in that way, if in none other. Though in your case art will be merely a pastime. You have already determined on your profession. Still even a lawyer can hardly dispose of his leisure time

more advantageously than in devoting it to art. I doubt not you will find painting a source of refined pleasure, an elegant accomplishment, even though you may not pursue it so persistently as I am bound to do. I confess that it is to me less delightful than it once was. I am too much its slave, the slave of the public, and I am very sensible of my bonds, though perhaps I should not speak of them. And now, Mr. Nightingale, I beg to thank you for your kindness in calling upon me. I am pleased that I have seen you. You will come again? You promise?"

I said that I would certainly come again, if I might, and bring my drawings.

"By all means, bring your drawings. I shall be delighted. Now, you will excuse me? I must divest myself of this masquerade suit." He smiled, and, with a wave of his white hand, drew attention to his court-dress. "I am compelled to observe forms and etiquettes of this kind. Good-bye, Mr. Nightingale."

He pressed my hand most cordially, moving towards me very gracefully, and keeping his dark eyes fixed upon me with his air of closely noting how far he had succeeded in impressing me.

"One moment," he said, as, making my best bow, I was quitting him. He touched the bell. "You may care to see such pictures as are now here, though there are none of much importance, I think, and the light is but indifferent." Proport appeared.

"Proport, be kind enough to ask Mr. Mole if he can come here for a minute or two." Proport withdrew.

"You will understand, Mr. Nightingale, that at any time, at all times, my gallery, my studio is open to you. You may perhaps in such wise gather some instruction in art. At least, you may learn to detect my errors, and so to avoid them in your own case."

The door opened; a man entered.

"Ah! Mr. Mole," said Sir George, "I am sorry to trouble you. I will not detain you. I have but a word to say. This is young Mr. Nightingale, a relation of mine, from the country, who has done me the honour to call and introduce himself to me. This, Mr. Nightingale, is Mr. Mole, a most valuable assistant of mine; I really do not know how I should possibly get on without his help. You will kindly, Mr. Mole, take a note of my young relation's address, in case I should

have occasion—and doubtless I shall have occasion—to communicate with him on some future day. And you will at all times allow him to have free access here, and show him the gallery, and the works we have in hand, and, in short, everything there is here to be seen, or that he may think worth looking at. You understand? Thank you. Again, Mr. Nightingale, excuse me, and good-bye.”

Sir George bowed and smiled, and, his hand resting upon the hilt of his slender court sword, he moved, with a light and elastic step, from the room.

Mr. Mole was Fane Mauleverer.

He had not recognised me at first, or he had retained very full command of his facial expression. He now winked, the door having closed after Sir George.

“Master Duke,” he whispered, hoarsely. “Of course! And *his* relation! To think of that! Hush!” He pressed his forefinger against his lips. After a moment he said, still in a whisper, “Not a word till he’s out of hearing. All right. He’s gone. How are you, my dear boy? God bless you. Who’d have thought of our meeting here!”

We shook hands most heartily. Indeed, in his excitement, he threw his arms round and embraced me. He had not abandoned his old theatrical ways.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. MOLE.

“Mauleverer!”

“No. Mole, please. Mauleverer no longer. It was my professional name, and I have relinquished my profession. I have assumed my own old real name, that my father, or, at any rate, my mother, bore before me—Mole, plain Mole. It was not suited to the stage, not for the higher walks; and I aimed high. For lovers and heroes Mole was an inappropriate appellation, was fatal to illusion, conveyed even a suspicion of the ridiculous. For comic dancing and singing it might perhaps have sufficed. A low comedian, I would have remained Mole contentedly enough. The name in that case might even have assisted me. I can fancy a Tommy Mole, a great popular favourite, received everywhere with a roar of applause, cordial if vulgar, and drawing largely on the treasury

every Saturday. But then the loss of dignity! And my ambition was to shine in high tragedy, or the most refined comedy. No; in the profession I could only be Fane Mauleverer."

"But you were called at the sheep-fair—you remember?—Signor Leverini—wasn't that the name?"

"Hush! Not a word of that! Forget it as an ignominious episode in a too adventurous career; or think of it as a frolic, an escapade, to which, in a mad hour, I descended, for a generous motive, to oblige the management—I think I stated as much to you at the time. I was as Haroun Alraschid in disguise, or our own Prince Hal playing a drawer. But I clowned it well; I'll say that. I stooped, but I conquered. I beat the buffoons on their own ground. I amazed the public. Still it was an error; such a victory was not worth my securing. And the list of killed, wounded, and missing! My dignity, my self-respect, my reputation, my professional rank. It was cruel work. No, the thing must not be remembered. That sheep fair! And then afterwards, the races—at Lockport, wasn't it? I forget the names of places. But you remember meeting me there? I was in a sorry plight then, and, truth to tell, matters became worse with me after-

wards. Those 'boothers' were pretty nearly the death of me. We got pitching among the fens somewhere, playing to wretched houses, asthmatic and aguish. I caught the marsh fever, or some horror of that sort. Don't mention it again; this is only for your private ear. I was for months in a county infirmary! They were kind to me, I own it with gratitude, and brought me round again. But my hair! You remember it? Noble, wasn't it? and I may say versatile. I could do anything with it. It was the envy of the profession. Mauleverer's hair was a thing to swear by. But now—that marsh fever!—all gone but a few wisps. There was enough to stuff a bolster at one time, to fill the lockets of the entire female population. And I won't say that some of it hasn't gone in that direction as it is. But now, you observe, the dream is over! I couldn't spare the thinnest lock; no, nor draw beauty by a single hair. The rounds of applause I used to obtain when the spectators first caught sight of me, the hair-dresser having done me justice! All was won, I felt, by a head—of hair. But 'tis past. If I had remained on the stage wigs would have been my doom for evermore. And I had so despised wigs! My strength was in my hair, my own hair, not another's."

He bowed his head humbly, that I might note how bald he was. But I had perceived this bereavement of his on the occasion of his visit to Mr. Monck's office.

"And my voice!" he resumed; "glorious, wasn't it? One is privileged to boast of what one once possessed. It is not vain-glory in such case; it is tender reverence for the departed. What compass! Eh? What power! Amazing! I had a light tenor for comedy that perfectly bewitched the boxes. In severe tragedy certain bass notes that I possessed stirred the hearts of the pit to their lowest depths. I could rant, too, upon occasion, as the galleries well knew. And rant is indispensable in special parts. Richard without his rant would be a cipher. But for his rant he would scarcely have risen to the throne; certainly he could never have been a leading part. The Bard knew what he was about. He was aware that the public liked rant, and he had a friendly regard for it himself. At least, he supplied abundant opportunities for it. Dramatic critics, who are always wrong by-the-bye, condemn rant. I count it almost the breath of life of high tragedy. Kindly declaim Othello's speech, 'Whip me, ye devils! Roast me in sulphur!'—I'm not quite

sure of the words, it's so long since I've gone on in the part, though my Othello was a good deal talked about at one time in the West of England—spout those lines, I say, with effect, and without ranting, and I'll give you—that is, I'll owe you—something. And take you this bit of advice: if you ever stroll—you won't probably, but you may, there's no knowing to what a man may be driven—always rant in serious towns. The audience like it. It reminds them of their favourite preachers; and they almost look about them, to put money in the plate as they come out of the theatre. But I talk only of myself. That's an actor's way, perhaps. I haven't that excuse, however. I'm an actor no longer. I've resumed my real name, returned to my original calling. I'm a painter now; an assistant of Sir George's, your relation, as it seems, much to my bewilderment. I knew that we should meet again, but I scarcely thought of our meeting here, after this fashion. Now tell me, my dear young friend, how you are, and what you've been doing all this long time?"

But it was in vain that I essayed to speak. Anything I ventured to say seemed to be but a cue to Mole—I must no longer describe him as Mauleverer—to commence a prolonged discourse, or to

renew his interrogations. He referred to the past continually. The mention of the Down Farm awoke in him a lengthy train of recollections. Thoughts of its bountiful fare still remained with him, the flavour of its amber ale yet seemed to linger on his palate. He inquired with much interest as to my uncle, a "trying audience," as he described him, and my mother, my "lady mother" he still preferred to say. He had not forgotten Kem, nor Reube, nor old Truckle, nor other of the farm servants. The pig he had most admired he still freshly remembered, and was interested in learning of the animal's conversion into pork, and the impression of him in that form left upon his consumers. He referred again to Dripford Fair, to Lockport races, and the booths there, in which he had been discovered. And so, insensibly, we approached the subject of Rosetta. Yet on the brink of mention of her he seemed to hold back.

"You had a side-ache, I remember," he said, "and you began to think you possessed a heart; a fancy took you, and you thought it love. Well, that's a young man's way. We know how to call things by their right names as we grow older. We no longer mistake a small liking for a great passion. Great passions! Are there such things off the

boards? The stage needs them, but the world can manage without them, I trow. Well, well. Wild oats yield good corn at last. The farm thrives, I think you said?"

"Do you know anything of Rosetta, Mauleverer?"

"Mole, I entreat you. Of Rosetta, the tight-rope dancer? No; I know nothing of her."

"She married Lord Overbury."

"I heard so. I heard that she said so. But does it matter? To you, of all people. The world has many Rosettas. I think I told you so before once."

"She was very beautiful."

"Possibly. I've seen a better-shaped nose. You remember my drive over the down after her with that fellow Diavolo? The fool I was to go upon such a journey."

"You admired her, then?"

"I did, comparatively. I am naturally frank, and I have never concealed the fact that I have been an ass in my time. That time may be over. I wish I could be quite sure of it. But I'm not. Let us talk of something else. Why should a rope-dancer occupy us thus? Come, own that she is nothing to you now."

"Very little."

"Say, nothing. Never be absurd for the sake of being consistent."

"I should be glad to hear of her happiness."

"One would be glad, of course, to hear of everybody's happiness, including one's own. But enough of that subject. Now, tell me. Why are you here? What are you doing in London?"

I told him that I had entered the legal profession.

"A lawyer, you! Why, it's like a fellow of guardsman's stature enlisting in the marines. You're a fallen angel. Pardon me, my dear boy. For your sake I'll henceforth try to think there's something in the law, something honest I mean; and that in certain aspects it may look less odious than I have hitherto accounted it. At any rate, there must be a leaven of good in the profession now that you've entered it. On the stage we always make the lawyer a scoundrel, and the audience approve. But perhaps we do now and then hold the mirror up a trifle askew; or the mirror, from long service, has become worn and blemished, cracked right across; it may even be. Tell me now of yourself."

I told him of my position in Mr. Monck's office, reminding him of his visit there. He was much

surprised. He would scarcely credit my statement.

"You there! and I not see you! Astounding!" he said. "But you recognised me?"

He was pleased when I informed him that something in the tone of his voice had reminded me of my old friend.

"A note or two is still left me," he observed, regretfully, and yet smiling. "But still you hesitated. I see: my 'make up' was so different. My hair! No wonder you did not know me."

I explained that I had followed him from the office, but had failed to overtake him.

"My boy! It was like yourself," he exclaimed. And then he coughed, and, with an embarrassed air, continued: "It was unfortunate, however. I had not gone far. You would have found me if you had but thought—of looking into the public-house at the corner. I stepped in, but for a moment, to ask my way, I think, or it may have been to see what o'clock it was—some trifling errand of that kind."

I laughed.

"Well, well. Why should I dissemble? Mine is a candid nature. I needed something to take the taste of the lawyer's office out of my mouth.

But to think of your bringing an action against Sir George!" He lowered his voice as he uttered that distinguished name.

I then informed him that it was I who had served Sir George with the writ. This interested him greatly. He was amused, and yet much shocked withal. "The presumption! the audacity of the thing!" he murmured. "To approach him, him of all people, with a writ! And the earth did not open? Your own relation too! It was the refinement of cruelty. And the other man, your friend, the managing clerk—Vickery, I think you called him?—he stood aloof, watching, like an old cat in the shade, eh? Yes; I recognise the old practitioner there, the veteran soldier; and you, the raw recruit, were sent into action. And you didn't know Sir George! It was really dramatic. How looked he? Frowningly? A countenance more in sorrow than in anger? I would I had been there!"

"It would have much amazed you," I said, continuing his Shakespearian quotations.

"Very like, very like." And he struck an attitude.

"But you, Mauleverer—Mole, I mean—how came you here? Where did you make Sir George's acquaintance?"

"Hush!" he said, mysteriously. "I'll tell you. But not here. I can't talk of him, here in this room. I dare not. I have made too free with his name already. We both have. For—Sir George is a great man—and"—this was in a whisper—"a strange one, too. Come away, up-stairs."

He led the way to an upper room.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STUDIO'S SECRETS.

It was a vast chamber divided by wooden screens or partitions, that did not reach to the ceiling, however. The enclosures thus formed had something the look of stalls in a stable. They were furnished as separate studios, with easels, chairs, draperies, and other conventional "properties" of portrait painting.

"This is our workshop," said Mole; "here Sir George's assistants—of whom I am one—paint his backgrounds, add accessories, furniture, skies, &c., advance his pictures for him in every way, rub in, dead colour, glaze, varnish, do all he requires, in fact."

"His pupils?"

"No, his assistants."

"He doesn't paint his own pictures, then?"

"My dear boy, of what are you thinking? He

sketches, arranges, touches—he leaves the rest to us. He couldn't possibly do all himself. He is the general in command; we fight under him. He wins the battle; you don't suppose we're mentioned in the despatches? We're paid for what we do; very fairly paid. If we don't like the service we can easily quit it. Perhaps I earn my money thoroughly, and think sometimes I have given value to the pictures they wouldn't otherwise have possessed; perhaps it is rather hard now and then to find another carry off the praise for a choice little bit of work of one's own. But I don't grumble. I am content. The thing must be. And I console myself with the reflection that he often puts his name to work I wouldn't own. If I may talk freely——” he hesitated.

“Most freely, so far as I'm concerned.”

“It sounds like treason, perhaps; but it's only honest criticism. You won't mind a trifle of truth-speaking about your distinguished relative?”

“Why should I?”

“Just so. Why should you? You never saw him before to-day. You owe him nothing: and he's a public man; he must expect criticism. Only I should prefer his not hearing what I'm about to observe.” He went to the door and closed it care-

fully, after pausing for a moment to listen. "He can't hear; he's down-stairs, at the back, in his bedroom. There may be thought something objectionable, you see, in one occupying my position speaking too frankly. But, as I said, he's a public man, highly esteemed, popular, and prosperous. It's the privilege of the unknown to criticise the known; and I'll say for them they usually avail themselves of the privilege. There may be something of envy about it. People are not perfect, you know. And their fondness for plain speaking may sometimes mean only a secret liking for detraction. If we can't rise to a great man's level, it seems as well to try and pull him down a little nearer ours. Well, the fact is, Sir George *can't draw*. He was never thoroughly grounded. His figures are uncommonly shaky. Only look at the knees of some of them, and the ankles. They stand on tiptoe because he can't plant them firmly on their feet. He wants assistance from competent draughtsmen as much as any painter I ever knew. I may add that, in my modest way, I've helped him a good deal in that matter."

"But——"

"You mean what *can* he do? My dear friend he understands colour—meretricious if you like,

but certainly brilliant—and he knows how to please. That's the secret of his success. Sitters don't come to him because they want truth, real art, absolute resemblance. They don't desire the tell-tale, painfully faithful, looking-glass style of portraiture. They come here to be beautified, rouged, pearl-powdered, and curled into darlings. He smooths wrinkled foreheads; restores youth; refines coarse shapeless lips into carmine Cupid's bows; lends aristocracy to the most plebeian nose—and his eyes! My eyes! if I may be allowed the vulgar exclamation, how they glitter! No matter if they should be really lost in half-tint or shadow. Nature is made to move aside. Sir George understands his patrons. They wish for gleaming eyes? His adroit speck of flake white is always at their service; they have them, with exquisite complexions, elegant figures, pared away or padded out as the particular case may require, arching brows, an amiable smirk, and all the rest of it. No wonder he succeeds. He doesn't paint nature, he doesn't pretend to, but only fashion, and fashion pays very handsomely, through the nose, or it wouldn't be fashion. His gentlemen are superb dandies, inane, perhaps, but invariably exquisite. His women, languid and delightful, but more fascinating than respectable.

Simply, he paints to please, and thrives accordingly. Sir George complies with the whims and wishes of his patrons. He is too polite and well-bred to hesitate. Perhaps has too keen a sense of his own interest. You will understand, therefore, why our portraits—I am well-advised in saying ours—are remarkable for lustre of eye, smallness of waist, length of neck, white hands, rounded arms, puffy chests, and taper ankles. These Fashion insists upon, not Art; but Fashion is the presiding divinity of portrait painting.”

“Still he has painted history.”

“He has tried to—he thinks he can. In his more sublime moments he looks forward, so he says, to discarding portraiture and taking up with high art. It will never be. It’s impossible. He can’t do it. I can show you his Abraham offering up Isaac. I will only say that Isaac is certainly not the only sacrifice in that work. And a Deluge, in which the painter was one of the first to go under, although he’d clung fast to the hands of Poussin among others. But I’ve talked enough treason for awhile. And, after all, Sir George is—Sir George—serjeant-painter to the king, the most popular portrait painter of the time, and—my employer. Indeed, I’ve said more than I ought, perhaps,

seeing that he's been really kind to me; that he's given me bread with butter on it, when I had little enough to put into my mouth of any kind in the way of food; and considering, too, that he's your relation, uncle or cousin, as it may be, and that it's your interest, possibly, to think well of him, conciliate him, and make a friend of him."

"He has many assistants?"

"Some half-dozen, but all are not constantly employed. A German skilled in architectural drawings—we specially need him in painting provincial mayors, who dearly love a castellated background, a Norman arch to issue from, a mediæval city in the distance. In that way their office acquires something of the sanctity of antiquity. Then we've an Italian chiefly employed in adding flowers and foliage to the portraits of ladies of fashion. We find dowagers very fond of being depicted standing in bowers plucking blush rose-buds. The flowers don't quite match the fierce bloom of their cheeks—the sunset glow of constant rouge; but they like a pastoral innocent surrounding; it's so suggestive of youth and ingenuousness. We usually supply militia colonels or deputy lieutenants of counties—who, of course, are always painted in uniform—

with distant battle-fields. For statesmen or cabinet ministers we generally select curtains, as conveying a sense of mystery. Ordinary members of parliament, especially when aldermen, prefer to be portrayed sitting in a library full of books they've never read. Silent members are invariably painted in the act of addressing the House. We have plenty to do, I can assure you. I count a background as the best part of a portrait. My old experience as a scene painter has stood me in good stead. Even Sir George has condescended to admire my masterly breadth of style. It's a little slapdash, I own, but he dislikes 'niggling.' You see that means expenditure of time and labour, and as the public doesn't require it, why give it?"

"It's quite a manufactory," I observed, glancing round the room.

"I called it our workshop, you remember. And, in the season, we're busy enough."

It occurred to me that Tony might find occupation in Sir George's service. Without doubt he was sufficiently qualified. But I did not care to venture on the subject immediately.

"Now you must see our show-room."

He led the way to a large gallery, lighted from the roof, and built out at the back of the house.

It contained various pictures and studies framed and hung against the walls—including Sir George's attempts in the way of historical art, of which Mole had previously spoken, and which did not greatly impress me—with many other works stacked together, and simply resting upon the floor. There was little method in the arrangement of the room. It had a neglected and dusty look.

"Some of these are merely beginnings that will never be completed," said Mole; "failures that have been laid on one side, experiments and sketches of all kinds. Some are left on our hands by disappointed sitters, unconscionable people, whom no amount of flattery will satisfy, and we're uncommonly liberal with it, too. Others have forgotten to pay, perhaps, and so their pictures are left here like unredeemed pledges. Sir George has a lordly way with him. He scorns to trouble himself about money. He'd never sue a sitter. He thinks law low—you'll excuse me for saying so. But that's the fashionable tone. They may take their portraits or leave them, it's all the same to him. He's exceedingly polite; but he'll have his own way, nevertheless; he won't be hurried or put out; they must wait his convenience. He sometimes makes quite a favour of

painting people at all. It's the only way, perhaps, of dealing with some of the grand folks who come here. Bully them, or they'd bully you. Yet he smiles and bows all the time quite wonderfully. It makes me shiver sometimes to see him. These are pictures come back for repair or alteration, I think. We've had no time to attend to them yet. Terribly faded, some of them, haven't they? We must light them up again, somehow."

Mole exhibited to me various canvases: portraits of Lords This and Ladies That—it was something like inspecting an illustrated edition of the Peerage—General Such-a-one and Admiral So-and-so: people of fame and fashion; though, I must own, that of many of them I had never before heard. There was a sort of family likeness existing among them all, it seemed to me; due to the painter's established and enduring manner. They were all smiling, all red-lipped and bright-eyed; gay of dress, elegant of attitude, and blooming of look. The ladies were represented as still in their first youth; though one of them, I happened to know, had been for some seasons a grandmother. No gentleman in the collection owned to being more than thirty-five years of age. It occurred to me that Sir George

must somehow have mixed his colours with the Elixir of Long Life, or dipped his brush in the Fountain of Youth ; a delightful juvenility characterised all his sitters, even to his provincial mayors and aldermen.

"I call this our Royal Room," said Mole, as he led the way to another chamber. "A man isn't serjeant-painter, you know, for nothing. The official salary is a mere trifle—to Sir George, I mean. To me nothing is a trifle that takes the form of money. But Sir George makes the post pay ; and quite right too. What would be the good of the post, or of any post, if it didn't pay ? Here we manufacture—that's the word—royal whole-lengths by the dozen, I may say. It's the serjeant-painter's right and privilege to supply these works ; they are supplied accordingly. We copy them ; he takes the money ; that's the way here of dividing labour, and responsibility, and profit."

In the centre of the room was reared a large portrait of the reigning sovereign, standing erect in the velvet robes, silk stockings, rosetted shoes, satin doublet, decorations and insignia of a knight of the garter. His white, ruffled hand carried a black velvet hat with rich ostrich plumes that swept the dais upon which he stood. I had never

seen the king. He seemed, judging by his picture, a simple-looking gentleman, with a facial angle that sloped unintellectually, overpowered somewhat by his fantastic trappings and finery, the while he was doing his best, I thought, to look majestic and august, and had advanced one of his legs, to which art had given much symmetrical grace, as though bidding the spectator note the admirable proportions of his calf. He had, apparently, but just discovered, with equal surprise and gratification, his advantages in this respect.

"We're for ever painting him; I get quite sick and tired of him and his robes too," said Mole, with disloyal bluntness. "You see it's the same thing over and over again. I could almost do it with my eyes shut, or with my toes. Wholesale, retail, and for exportation. What becomes of them all, you wonder? Presents to foreign sovereigns, to ambassadors and the corps diplomatique; furniture for official residences. Every minister accredited to a foreign court is presented with one of these portraits to hang up in his reception rooms, and he keeps it afterwards as a perquisite. A new ambassador, a new portrait. That's the system, and it pays the serjeant-painter. There's something to be said for perquisites, no

doubt. I should think better of them, perhaps, if some fell to my share ; but none do, as it happens. Whenever we've nothing better to do we take up with a royal whole-length. We know it will be wanted sooner or later. We keep the article in stock, so to speak, and Sir George touches upon the work afterwards—perhaps. At any rate, he always adds his name to it, and, as I have said, takes the money for it. What have we here? Some early studies, I fancy. Don't touch them. They're covered with dust."

He was turning over certain works that had been placed together in a corner of the room with their faces to the wall.

"Stop," I cried suddenly. "I know that picture."

"This one? A study for a larger work, I should say. Portrait of a nobleman. I don't know him, though."

"It's Lord Overbury."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. The completed picture—I've seen it—hangs in Overbury Hall."

I could not be mistaken, though years had passed since I had first seen the work. All came back to me. My first admission to the Hall through

the window of the little room; the satyr; and the picture! He stood again beside me, staring and laughing at me, as he flung his hot rum-and-water at his own portrait—painted, it was clear, by Sir George Nightingale. He had mused over my name in his strange confused way. I now began to understand why, and why he had shown me the picture. He had known Sir George, and I had by mere chance reminded him of the fact. It was certainly curious.

“Lord Overbury,” said Mole, “painted years ago, it’s plain. If it was ever like him, it’s not like him now.”

“You’ve seen him, then?”

“Yes. I’ve seen him.”

“Of late? In London?”

“Not long since, in London. But what does it matter? What’s Lord Overbury to you or you to Lord Overbury? Ah! I see. The husband of Rosetta. Sits the wind in that corner still? But, I remember, you would be glad to hear of her happiness. That was the word.”

I did not care to question him further upon the subject just then. I should have liked to learn something more concerning Lord Overbury, if, indeed, Mole had anything to tell. But I was un-

willing that he should tease me about Rosetta, or that he should suppose she still occupied my heart. Nevertheless, I shrank from avowing how little I now loved her. I had some tenderness and reverence for my departed passion. I could not bear to disturb its ashes for mere amusement's sake, or to satisfy an idle curiosity.

"You've not explained, Mole," I said, "how you came to know Sir George."

"It's soon told. I met him at Covent Garden—'behind.' He has, of course, the entrée of the green-room."

"And he goes there—often?"

"Often. Where doesn't he go? And where isn't he welcome? Well, mine was but a humble position. In truth, I was little better than what's called a 'super.' They would have made me under-prompter, but my uncertainty of voice—I lose it altogether at times—hindered that. I could scarcely be trusted to deliver a message. The gallery got 'guying' me when I was hoarse, and crying, 'Speak up!' to me. But they didn't—they couldn't know what my voice had been. It was hard, wasn't it? Well, I bore it as I could. The green-room wasn't for me, you know. I could only hover about the entrance, and—you remember my

black shades? Well, I hadn't forgot how to use my scissors. It was humiliating, but what was I to do? I cut out portraits, in my old style—you remember?—of anybody I came near. Sir George among the rest. In his grand way, he was amused—interested. He questioned me. He gave me his address, and bade me call upon him. He thought it a pity I should be doing no better. He smiled upon me, he was most polite. He almost blushed as he offered me money. I took it—without blushing. I'd fallen so I'd well-nigh forgotten how to. You see, though I've spoken freely of him, very freely, that man, your relation, has a kind place in his heart, though it isn't always uppermost, nor easy to find at a short notice. That's why some have persuaded themselves it doesn't exist at all. But he was really kind to me. He tried me with work, he found that I could paint, could be of service to him. He didn't decide in a hurry, but he did decide, in my favour. He offered me regular occupation upon fair terms—better far than I could hope to obtain, in my unfortunate state, at the theatre. I accepted his offer. I think I may say, and yet be modest, that he found me more useful than he had ventured to expect. The fact is, I *can* draw and paint. I always could. But one day I

discovered that I had a voice and a head of hair, and I became what's called stage-struck. I fluttered about the lamps till they singed and scorched me, past all recovery. And now I'm, as you see, Sir George Nightingale's assistant, and your old friend and servant to command, Master Duke, whom I'm pleased and proud to meet again. God bless you!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MY TREACHERY.

"You've a certain look of Sir George, I think, 'a trick of Cœur de Lion's face.' But 'tis not much. Some token of the Nightingales, it may be. I could not swear to it, however. There are things that run in families; line of brow, and glance of eye; mould of nose, and cut of lip. We get these from our forefathers, whatever their worth. Oftentimes it's all they have to hand down to us. An heirloom in the form of a snub-nose is no such prize; no, nor a long-descended gout or hereditary rheumatism. You haven't Sir George's smile, however. Well, we can dispense with that. There are some smiles that set one's teeth on edge, and worse. 'Why, I can smile and murder while I smile,' says Richard. And you haven't Sir George's inches. No, Master Duke, he's the handsomer and finer man. 'An older soldier, not a better. Did

I say better?' He's a noble figure; I own that. He would have succeeded on the boards; he's to the manner born. What a Joseph Surface he'd have made! I shouldn't mind playing Charles to his Joseph, even now. But for lovers! No; he could not touch me there; nor in parts of passion or tenderness. But in Iago he'd be my match, I think; and Iachimo, there's a wily Italian look in his face, perfect of its kind; and in Shylock he might run me hard. But this is idle. He's Sir George the Great, and I'm his humble assistant, with my voice departed and no head of hair. One thing, he's even balder than I am. There's comfort in that. He'd have to find himself in wigs not less than I should. It's a stage convention that heroes should be thickly thatched. Why not a hairless Hamlet, or a Romeo with a bare poll? The audience would grin and guff; yet why not those gentlemen as bald as others? I grow weak on this topic, and envious; and an inclination towards scalping comes over me. Your hair is very thick, my young friend. Cherish it, but not with vanity. It will perish and fall as the leaves do, as mine did. 'Oh! Hamlet, what a falling off was there!'"

I parted with my old friend newly found on most cordial terms. I gave him my address, and pro-

mised to see him again very shortly. Altogether I was much gratified with the results of my visit to Harley-street.

Sir George perplexed me somewhat. I admired and liked him, but a measure of doubt mingled with these sentiments. Certainly he had been kind to me, and very courteous. Yet I felt that there was the coldness and the polish as of marble about his manner. He was unlike, in every respect, any one I had ever seen before. He seemed to possess a magnet's power, both of attraction and repulsion. Even Mole, the while he permitted himself great liberty of speech concerning him, yet clearly was impressed with some awe of his employer. He had conveyed this only vaguely, seeming to be unwilling to descant upon it definitely, preferring to dwell upon Sir George's method of conducting his profession. Yet, after allowing for a certain exaggeration to which he was prone, the result of his theatrical career, much significance had pertained to his looks and gestures, and to the curious changes of his husky voice. He feared Sir George. "A great man, and a strange one too;" so Mole had described him.

Yes, he was strange, undoubtedly. He seemed to belong almost to a different order of creation: to

stand widely apart from us on the strength of some natural law. If we were flesh and blood, then he was otherwise constituted. But it was no fault of his, probably, if we failed to understand him, and therefore took up a position far removed from his. After all, who were we that we should presume to judge him? Mole was—Mole or Mauleverer—a hapless stroller, to whom it was promotion to work as a journeyman in the portrait-painter's studio. And I was—young Mr. Nightingale, from the Down Farm, an articled clerk, an insignificant boy, albeit I knew a little of art, and had written a five-act tragedy in blank verse.

In truth, what fault had I to find with Sir George? I had claimed kindred with him, and forthwith my claim had been allowed. He had not hesitated for a moment. That delay had occurred in the matter was solely my own fault. He had acknowledged me as his relative, had welcomed my visit, had begged me to repeat it, had offered to serve and assist me in any way that was possible. Had I gone to him sooner so much the sooner would his kindness have been displayed to me. Of what, then, had I to complain?

That he had long lived apart from his relatives at Purrington, insomuch that they, I felt assured,

knew very little of him, his fame, his prosperity, his high station, could scarcely be charged against him as a fault. His occupied and public career, their remote and secluded existence, naturally hindered their meeting. It was unlikely, it was scarcely possible, that they should know much of each other. Their ways of life, of character, of thought, would perhaps have sundered them somewhat even under conditions more favourable to their union. And, as I judged, the relationship was not very close. My father was not of Purrington. It was only by his marriage that the Nightingales were connected with the Orme family, or with the present inmates of the Down Farm. I represented that link, and Sir George had at once recognised it, without hint of reluctance or distaste. He had done all that the situation had seemed to demand of him. He had inquired concerning my mother and my uncle with all necessary courtesy; any great show of cordiality in regard to them was not to be looked for. Still I must end as I began: Sir George perplexed me somewhat. I felt that I did not comprehend him.

I sent my mother a full account of my visit to my distinguished kinsman.

She replied briefly. She was pleased to learn that Sir George had shown me kindness. She had

always understood that his success in his profession had been very great. She trusted that I would always treat him with the consideration and respect due to his elevated position. At the same time she cautioned me not to trespass on his politeness, nor to intrude upon him too frequently, seeing how valuable his time must necessarily be. I was to be very careful not to overtax his friendliness towards me, nor to construe his offers of service too literally. The great were often tempted out of courtesy to say more than they really meant. Concerning my delay in presenting the letter of introduction she made no remark. It was plain that she did not view it as a matter of any moment. In a postscript she stated that she should be glad to be informed of any further interviews Sir George might favour me with.

Tony, to whom I hastened on quitting Harley-street, was much gratified with my narrative, and in his sanguine way predicted the most surprising consequences as likely to ensue from it. He looked upon my fortune as made. He regarded Sir George as a very glorious person indeed. He had not, he owned, hitherto held the serjeant-painter's art in very high estimation; henceforward he promised to view it much more favourably. It was a pity, he

thought, that I was not a painter. In such case I might certainly look for Sir George's mantle, in his character of serjeant-painter, to descend upon me. Still, he would surely assist me, and further my interests in a great variety of ways. A bachelor, why should he not adopt me? He was not likely to marry now. Could he do better than constitute me his heir, in right of my name and my supreme abilities? Tony had a great deal to say on this subject.

I did not as yet venture to touch upon the plan I had formed for obtaining him employment in Sir George's studio. I felt that it would be premature until I knew more of Sir George, and had ascertained whether I could possibly, with any hope of succeeding, address him upon the matter. Still I hoped that this opportunity of assisting my friend might speedily arise. For I could see that there was real necessity for Tony's finding occupation and proper reward. He did not complain, and, to all appearance, was as gay and light of heart as ever. But, in truth, his task of colouring the plates of the *Milliner's Magazine* was wretched drudgery, and very ill-remunerated. He was capable of doing much better; for he possessed real ability, though it might stand considerably in need of discipline

and guidance. He was poor, and he had now begun to look poor. He was forced to deny himself many things—trifling luxuries they might be—but he had been accustomed to them for so long, that to lose them was a real deprivation to him. Poverty was indeed pinching him. His old dainty, dandy air was almost gone from him. He explained laughingly that he now cultivated an artistic slovenliness of appearance, and that he should let his beard grow, when Nature was kind enough to assist him in carrying out that intention. He persistently refused to borrow money of me. Again and again he put back my proffered purse; not that there was much in it, but I knew that his means were now reduced to nothing almost.

“There’s a good deal due to me,” he said, “and of course it will all be paid one of these fine days. But just now, you know, I haven’t the heart to plague poor Rachel about it. I’m sure she’s no money to spare. I must get on without it somehow. I own I’m dreadfully hard up, but, poor child, she mustn’t know it. She’s got quite enough trouble on her hands already.”

I could not urge him to apply to Rachel. I knew well that the Monck household was terribly straitened at this time. Still, I felt that my good,

generous friend was hardly and unfairly used. I missed, even more than he did, perhaps, his dandy graces and adornments; his glossy clothes, light gloves, flowered button-holes, and tasselled canes. They suited him so well that they seemed to be part of himself. It was hard that he and shabbiness should make acquaintance, and become close allies. He was to me as a dainty flower to be carefully treasured in a delicate vase of ornate glass or painted china; not thrust into a coarse vessel of pewter or brown earthenware. I was greatly grieved when he told me that he had paid his first visit to a pawnbroker. He spoke lightly and laughingly of it, but he blushed a little the while.

"There was no help for it," he said. "I didn't like it, but I don't feel ashamed. I couldn't get on without an advance. All will come right by-and-by. It's simply a commercial transaction. Nobody is thought the worse of for charging an estate; why, then, should people look askance at one for mortgaging one's superfluities of dress? The scale of the affair can't make any difference. Pawnbroker is not a pleasant word; but call the lender mortgagee, or even 'uncle,' as the world does, and it's surprising what a difference it makes. He appears in quite an amiable light; a family

friend who has kindly stepped in to render valuable aid in a sudden emergency. He wouldn't look at my art studies in oil—there, I think, he was wrong, for they are really well worth looking at; but he was very ready with an advance upon my shirt-studs. I hold his tickets as the title-deeds of those articles of jewellery. I shall redeem the mortgage, of course, as soon as may be. Meanwhile, don't look so serious, my dear Duke, please don't. I haven't robbed the pawnbroker's till. I don't like 'spouting,'—that's the word—but could I help it? Surely it's better than applying to Rachel — troubling her under present circumstances?"

It was better; I felt that. Yet I reminded him that he might have borrowed of me.

"You're the best fellow in the world," he kindly said, and there was the glisten of tears in his eyes as he spoke. "But you see I don't like creditors; it's pleasant to me to abuse them. Now I couldn't do that with any sort of justice or sense of comfort if you were one of them. Could I? I should be landed in all kinds of inconveniences. I should have to keep a perpetual watch over my tongue. One cannot be always making exceptions, passing saving clauses. I'm rather fond of sweeping state-

ments myself. I should constantly, in the most unconscious way, be treading on your corns. No ; you wouldn't mind or cry out very much, I dare say. But think of the pain *I* should feel, when I came to remember, as I should surely do, my folly, my thoughtless ingratitude."

I had seen Rachel again and again. She had sent for me on business of the office, Vickery being the bearer of her message. He performed his task in this respect with considerable reluctance, still disapproving, as it seemed to me, my admission to the upper chambers of the house. Rachel I found always seated at her desk in the front drawing-room. Her manner did not vary ; it was uniformly simple, kindly graceful. Her industry was quite exemplary ; she executed her task of copying papers and documents with the same diligence and completeness. She looked pale and worn, I thought, but her steady eyes were still bright, her smile was not less engaging, and the wistful beauty of her air and expression appealed to me more and more forcibly. From each interview with her I returned with my heart still further stirred by admiration of her, by a sense of devotion to her. But I said no word of this to any one. I felt that I could not trust myself to speak upon the subject to Tony,

from whom otherwise I had few secrets. I knew that she loved him. He did not even suspect this; but by-and-by he might discover it—and then?

I had not seen Mr. Monck. But I learned that his state of health had much amended; could now be more hopefully viewed, indeed, than had been possible for some time past. I surmised this in the first instance from a certain change I one day noted in Rachel. She seemed relieved, not altogether, but still in an appreciable degree, from the pressure of a cruel burden. Her air had become less subdued, and, if I may say so, more girlish. She spoke more freely, and I was enthralled by the beauty of her smile. In reply to my inquiries, she informed me that Mr. Monck was really better.

She complimented me upon the improvement in my handwriting. Indeed, I had taken pains to merit her approbation. No doubt my penmanship still left much to be desired. There had been a change, however, and, under the circumstances, any change could not but be for the better.

It was sometimes our joint task to compare the transcripts we had made with the draft or original writings. We took turns in reading aloud and noting any clerical errors that might have crept into our copies. The papers were for the most part

uninteresting even to unintelligibility—proceedings in Chancery, or, now and then, abstracts of title and other complicated conveyancing matters. Still I found the occupation very delightful.

She had been reading in her peculiarly clear, soft, musical tones. She stopped suddenly, and there danced a charming sparkle of merriment in her dark, grey eyes, as she said, "I'm afraid you have not been attending, Mr. Nightingale. I skipped a line on purpose to try you; and you took no notice of the omission."

It was true. I had been listening to the silvery melody of her voice, regardless of the dull, formal words she uttered. I murmured vague apologies. I owned that for the moment my attention had strayed. I could hardly confess the plain truth.

"It's really important these copies should be correct," she said, quietly. "Perhaps in future it will be better that you should read. Only you must take care to leave off when you're tired."

It was so pleasant to be near her, and to steal occasional glances over the top of the papers at the graceful lines of her bowed head, at the rich bands of her dark hair, her tiny transparent ear, and the delicate colouring of her brunette cheek and neck, that however great the risk of losing my place

scandalously, and seeming absurdly stupid in her eyes, I went on reading sometimes until my tongue clove to my palate, and my voice died away into the faint inarticulate murmur of wind in a pipe. I was determined to go on until power of utterance quitted me altogether.

"I'm sure you're tired. You *must* be tired. In any case, that will do for to-day. I congratulate you, Mr. Nightingale. Your copy is most correct." I was quitting the room when she said, with a rather confused air, "You have seen my cousin of late?"

"I saw him last night, Miss Monck."

"And he is well? Quite well? It is so long since we have met!"

"He is rather busy, I think."

"Busy? Ah! I remember — he told me. Colouring plates for a magazine. Poor Tony!" She pressed her hand upon her forehead. "He is paid for what he does, I hope?"

"Yes. He is paid, but not very handsomely, I fear."

"Poor Tony!" And she sighed. "But he mustn't desert me. You have influence with him, Mr. Nightingale. Kindly tell him not to forget me. Will you? Not formally, you know; not as

though I had asked you to remind him. But it's really so long since I've seen him. It's not right of him to keep aloof from me."

She rested her head upon her hand, and seemed to lose herself in thought. I noticed the tears gather in her eyes. I quietly withdrew.

I spoke to Tony on the subject. He admitted that he had not been to Golden-square for some time past.

"I'll go soon," he said; "but not yet. You see, poor Rachel will think I've come for money, and she'll trouble herself dreadfully about it. I long to be able to say to her, 'I'm independent, Rachel. I can earn enough to live on. Never mind about the arrears of my annuity, or its future payment.' I don't care to see her until I can say that to her. I soon shall, I do fervently trust."

I had lately received a liberal remittance from my uncle. He expressed a hope that I would make it last for some time, adding a mild warning against extravagance. In a kindly postscript, however—which I judged to be of my mother's suggesting—he stated that he was well aware that London was an expensive place, and he would not have me deny myself any comforts suitable to my position and occupation in life.

I then carried into execution a cunning plan I had formed.

"Tony," I said, "Miss Monck has charged me to give you these." I handed him five guineas. "You will kindly give me a receipt—it's a matter of business, you see, and I should like to satisfy her that I have faithfully discharged her commission. One can't be too business-like in such cases."

He was completely deceived. But he was of most unsuspecting nature at all times.

"It's very good of Rachel. I can't say that the money has come before it was wanted. But I do hope that the poor child has not pinched herself. I ought to call and thank her, or at any rate to make sure that she can really spare the amount. I know that she has many calls upon her just now."

I was alarmed.

"I told her you were very busy, and made excuses for you on that score. I thought you had quite resolved not to see her until you had really good news to tell."

He did not go to Rachel. My treachery was well intended. Yet I regretted it. I felt that I had not dealt fairly with Rachel Monck, and that

my motives might be gravely misconstrued. I was chargeable with loving her myself, and on that account sundering her from one I knew she loved. Yet in good sooth there had been no such stuff in my thoughts.

CHAPTER XV.

MY TRAGEDY.

I COULD not resist mentioning to Vickery that I had seen my relation, Sir George Nightingale, and discovered in him the defendant in the action brought by Messrs. Dicker Brothers. "Ay, ay," he said, going on with his writing, and declining to manifest the slightest surprise. By-and-by he added, as he paused to take snuff, "It's always as well to make sure of the name of the party whom you serve with a writ. It's often necessary to make an affidavit on the subject. You'll remember that another time, Mr. Nightingale. There's nothing like picking up learning in a practical way." And thereupon he dismissed the subject. Whether, at the time he instructed me how to serve a writ upon Sir George, he was aware of the relationship existing between us, I failed to ascertain.

I had called again in Harley-street, but had been unable to see Sir George. I left a select number of my drawings for his inspection. Mole charged himself with their safe keeping, and promised to submit them to his superior at a convenient opportunity. Mole was hearty in his applause of my works, and congratulated me on my marked improvement since those past times when I had received at his hands my earliest lessons in art. It was agreed between us, however, that for the present, at any rate, it should not be revealed that he was Fane Mauleverer, my first master. He had conceived, I think, a curious tenderness for his reputation as Mr. Mauleverer, and desired that it should be based solely upon his theatrical career, and disconnected from his other occasional pursuits. The world in general was not to know that he had ever cut out black shades, or taught drawing, or been employed in the studio of a portrait painter; still less, that he had ever figured as clown to a dancer on the "tight-jeff."

Tony had been much entertained with my account of Mole, and had expressed great desire to make his acquaintance. It was arranged, with this view, that Mole should be invited to an entertainment I was to give at Tony's chambers. These

were preferred to my lodgings, because it was thought possible the festivities of the occasion might be prolonged to a late hour, and might be of a boisterous character. There was a project that my tragedy should be forthcoming, and that elocutionary efforts connected therewith should be freely ventured upon. In Featherstone-buildings, as I have stated, the declamation of my blank verse had already been the occasion of some unpleasantness. My fellow-lodgers had complained, and my landlady had charged me with disappointing the expectations she had formed on the subject of my steadiness. As Tony stated, nothing of this kind was possible in regard to any proceedings that might take place in his chambers.

"It's a humble abode," he said, "small, confined, and the ceiling is uncommonly near one's head. But it has this great advantage: one can kick up a row in it if one wants to; and it seems to me that most people take chambers because they do want to kick up a row in them. No one hereabout has any right to complain of any occasional excess of noise. We've no landladies here; nor fellow-lodgers. I'm not a lodger at all; I'm a tenant of a distinct leasehold dwelling-place, of which I am absolute proprietor so long as I pay my rent. And I've

done that hitherto pretty regularly. The benchers, or ancients, or whatever they're called, of the inn assemble every quarter to discharge their sole function—so far as I can ascertain—the receipt of rent. Every tenant paying his rent is entitled, in addition to a formal receipt, to a large slice of plum cake and a glass of brown sherry. I have taken the plum cake on several occasions; it has not agreed with me. The sherry I have never declined. But this is all apart from the main question: the right of kicking up a row. To that we possess an indefeasible title. My neighbour below plays the French horn, and distresses me very much. A tenant next door thinks he can sing; he can't, and I find his efforts very trying. But I feel that these are not matters with which I can in any way interfere. So that if I choose to have in my rooms a row taking the form of blank verse, I should like to see the man who will gain-say me."

It was hard, I thought, that my tragedy or any declamation that might arise from it, should be unhesitatingly classed with that vulgar form of disturbance described as "kicking up a row;" but experience was against me. The complaints in Featherstone-buildings in regard to my reading of

my work had been couched precisely in that form of words.

I was pleased to see the interest Tony took in the proposed entertainment. He had of late denied himself recreation of almost every kind, partly because of the expense involved, and partly because of his desire to devote himself to the task of colouring the plates of the *Milliner's Magazine*. We had not visited the theatre for some time past. I did not care to go without him; and I did not wish to appear less thrifty than he was. I took up, therefore, with his economical humour. He rarely dined in Rupert-street now. He had discovered a ham and beef shop in Gray's Inn-lane, remarkable, as he alleged, for the moderation of its charges, and the excellence of its wares. He was eloquent on the subject of its large sixpenny plates of beef. But he grew thinner, I perceived.

It was Tony's proposition that Vickery should be invited to meet Mole. It did not, however, appear to me that this was a very promising arrangement.

"Depend upon it there's more in Vickery than you're prepared for," said Tony. "He wants stirring up, that's all; like tea, you know, when the sugar's at the bottom of the cup."

I remembered how highly Rachel had spoken of the old clerk. I felt that I had perhaps regarded him unjustly. He was invited accordingly to Tony's chambers. Somewhat to my surprise he consented to appear. He seemed even pleased, and his manner was irreproachably polite, if in rather a dry, old-fashioned way. There was certainly a gleam as of pleasure in his watchful, cat-like eyes.

I made liberal provision for the entertainment. Bottles of wine and spirits were obtained from a neighbouring tavern. Supper was to be served at a given hour with the assistance of the same establishment, and was to be of a plentiful character. A bowl of punch was to be brewed. There was no lack of pipes, tobacco, and cigars; meanwhile, these articles were arranged in a decorative manner upon the mantelpiece, insomuch that it looked like the window of a tobacconist's shop on a small scale, only wanting the figure of a Highlander taking snuff, or a negro smoking, to make the resemblance complete.

Tony had arranged his rooms to the best advantage, fixing lighted candles in unusual places, and decking the walls with his most striking drawings. With a line of flower-pots he contrived to mask the fact that the window looked on to a gutter. He

even procured laurel boughs, and with a view to greater picturesqueness of effect, introduced oranges here and there amongst the foliage. He surveyed these artifices with great satisfaction.

"Now, if the moon will only rise properly above the chimney-pots opposite we shall really have a most charming effect. Anybody might think we were in Verona. I'll pack away the easel in this corner, and then, with four chairs—we shall only want four—we shall just have room to circumnavigate the table. I'll take this chair myself, because I know one of its legs is in an unsettled state, and is liable to come off; it only wants a little humouring, and I understand its ways. Now I think all is really in readiness for the reception of our guests. There's a knock at the door!"

"Proud to know the young friend of my young friend," said Mole in his grandest manner as I introduced him to Tony, and they cordially shook hands. "Youth and friendship, and the fine arts, and—and supper"—his eye had rested for a second upon the knives and plates, and his speech had irresistibly been influenced by their significance—"has life greater gifts to bestow? I'm a trifle winded—if I may employ the term—by the number of your stairs. An asthma troubles me at times,

and my voice fails me. It was the same, you may have heard, with Kemble."

Indeed, Mole was very hoarse. His tones struggled for issue and escape, as from thick bandages of blankets. He was clean shaven and wore a protuberant shirt-frill, in honour of the occasion: his thin hair being neatly arranged in lines across his pate, so that it looked something like a sheet of ruled paper, or a page from a copy-book.

"Yes, many flights of stairs, but as in the case of mountain-tops, the pains of ascent are repaid by the prospect obtained. An attic, a really charming attic. I am partial to attics. I have made my home in them, I may say, nearly all my life. I adore an attic. I can breathe in an attic." He was breathing in rather a troubled way at the moment, however. "I find space to move and to turn round in." This was saying a good deal for Tony's apartment; for when Mole waved his arms in his redundant, gesticulatory way, he could almost touch the wall on either side. "There is freedom in the very atmosphere. Yes, seek tyranny and despotism in gilded halls and marble palaces; but for Liberty, you will find her ever at home, happy and glorious in the humility of her garret!" The

delivery of this sentiment seemed to afford him great gratification. He shook hands with us both again. "And here, if I mistake not," he continued, pointing to the pictures on the walls, "are achievements of promise, at any rate. The germs of greatness, it may be. Why not? Yes, I observe dexterity of design, not always unerring, perhaps, yet of worth; and a sense of colour, so far as I may judge by this candlelight, immature but really powerful."

Another knock. Vickery, of course. Tony hastened to admit him.

"He wants work," I said to Mole. "I wish much to get him work. Does he paint well enough, do you think, to help in Sir George's studio?"

"It was one of my flourishes," whispered Mole, huskily. "To tell the honest truth, I haven't really looked at his work. But it's my way always to entertain my audience; with the true text if possible; if not—without. How do you do, sir? I am gratified to meet you again?"

This was to Vickery, who, wearing a prodigiously stiff black satin stock, but not otherwise altered in appearance, now entered the room, accompanied by Tony.

"We have met——" said Vickery, eyeing his interlocutor doubtfully.

"At Mr. Monck's office. You may remember. I discharged an account there, one day. I don't do such things so often, that I can forget them. And it was not a claim upon myself, I may add. In such case the result might have been different. It was upon Sir George Nightingale—the relative, as it proved, of my young friend here. You recollect?"

"Precisely. But—we're out of office hours now." And Vickery proffered his tin snuff-box with a grin upon his face of a not disagreeably subacid kind.

"Capital face and figure for Marrall or Wormwood," Mole whispered to me. "Strange," he mused, "that now I've quitted the stage, I am constantly struck with the notion that there's a good deal yet to be done in the way of 'making up.' The public hasn't found it out, but both painters and players might, with advantage, study more than they do from the living model. Your friend's capital. What a hit he'd make in village lawyers! With a dab of rouge here and there, and a trifle of yellow ochre, I could go on for him, and secure a round on my entrance. I could have done

it at one time with my own hair, brushed forward and touched with powder; but that's all over now."

To do Vickery justice, he certainly strove to make himself agreeable, and fairly succeeded. He seemed to put from him much of his customary demeanour as Mr. Monck's managing clerk, and to assume an air of pleasantness that, if somewhat staid and stiff, was yet most commendable. A certain legal flavour pertained to his conversation, as though his powers of speech had been long buried amongst parchments, and had caught something of their dry and musty nature. He was politely deferential in manner, and his studied "Mr. Nightingale" contrasted with the free "my dear Duke" of my earlier friend Mole. Tony he invariably addressed as "Sir," in recognition, possibly, of his being the nephew of Mr. Monck. He really proved a likeable elderly gentleman. He looked about him now and then in his wonted cautious and scrutinising way; but he made himself at home in Tony's room, seemed thoroughly at ease, and most willing to play his part in the entertainments of the evening. He sat rubbing his knees, giving utterance to some dry speech lightly tinged with drollery; he took snuff liberally, and,

as the night advanced, he smoked a pipe, and looked very comfortable indeed. As I noted his grave wary face, and the little jets of smoke slowly permitted to issue from his lips, as though it was of value, in the nature of a fund in court, and not to be expended without much deliberation and pause, it occurred to me that if ever a judge on the bench indulged in a pipe, he must have looked the while much as did Vickery thus occupied.

Moreover he disclosed a curious interest in the stage. This took us all by surprise, and greatly delighted Tony. It really seemed that just as some people rejoice in sly dram-drinking, so Vickery was addicted to furtive playgoing.

"Why, I never saw you at the theatre, Vickery," said Tony.

"I've seen you there, sir, and Mr. Nightingale also. I usually sit in the two shilling gallery. But I don't go so often as I did. The stage is not now what I can remember it. The drama is not what it was."

"I quite agree with you, sir. Will you permit me the pleasure of shaking hands with you again?" said Mole, coming forward. He had been sitting apart, turning over the leaves of my manuscript tragedy.

"Mrs. Siddons! ah! she *was* a woman!" cried Vickery, with strange effusiveness.

"Say a divinity, rather!"

"Precisely," said Vickery.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE DOGE.

"I FIND that our young friend here has been writing a tragedy," observed Mole.

"In blank verse. One of the finest works in the language, I venture to state," said Tony, stoutly.

"Indeed! I had no idea of anything of the kind. Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Nightingale." And Vickery bowed to me, with difficulty, for his stock was very stiff. "I should much like to hear it read. Or select passages from it," he added warily.

In justice to myself I must say that I would willingly have kept my tragedy in the background; that I did not at all desire its production. We were getting on capitally without it. The entertainment was proceeding most successfully. An unexpected fraternisation on the subject of the theatre had arisen between my two guests, who had not, in the

first instance, promised any cordiality of union. And the cue, so to speak, for the entrance of my play was certainly unfortunate. Both Mole and Vickery were agreed as to the fallen state of the modern stage. Now they could hardly look for its uplifting at my hands. Mole had known me in a schoolboy's round jacket; Vickery knew me as an articled clerk in Mr. Monck's office. To neither was I a person of much consequence.

Still it was a friendly audience. We were all on good terms with each other, and with ourselves. The punch (compounded by Mole) had freely circulated, and had won hearty approval. The supper (over which Mole presided) had been unexceptionable: the lobster salad, I remember (Mole had dressed it), obtaining especial applause. I may say that Mole had greatly assisted me in enacting the character of host; indeed, like a too powerful ally, he almost overcame and effaced my efforts altogether. I was but a young performer, and, as he explained to me, he was accustomed to play "leading parts" in situations of the kind. The excessive zeal of his aid in no way dissatisfied me, however. I felt, indeed, grateful to him for his exertions in furtherance of the evening's pleasures. Both Tony and I were conscious, I think, of our juvenility as

hosts in the presence of Mole and Vickery. Still, we did all we could in the way of producing bottles, filling glasses, and handing pipe-lights. Nevertheless, Mole seemed to be the absolute manager, and wore all the airs of giver of the feast.

My manuscript, neatly covered with brown paper, was laid upon the table. But it was soon made clear to me that Mole, and not the author, was to be the interpreter of the work.

"Leave it to me, my dear Duke," he said. "I'm accustomed to this sort of thing. I think I can give it better effect. Authors are invariably bad readers. I never knew an exception."

I consented. Not very reluctantly, for I felt nervous and diffident, and distrustful of my elocutionary powers. And it was true, no doubt, that authors were, as a rule, indifferent readers of their own works. I had forgotten, at the moment, Mole's asthmatic condition. He was terribly husky, and the supper he had consumed seemed to oppress and veil his tones more than ever.

"Kemble had a 'foggy throat,' you remember," he said to me, apologetically; "it did not prevent his doing great things, however." He cleared his voice—so far as it could be cleared—which, indeed, was not very far.

He had sat down and arranged two candles in front of him, after the manner of a public lecturer. A glass of hot punch, however, was substituted for the conventional tumbler of cold water. He opened the manuscript, smoothing it with his hands very deliberately; and carefully curling the corners of the leaves so that he might turn them over promptly. He stretched out his arms, until I plainly heard sundry stitches in his coat give way; he was anxious to have sufficient room and freedom for whatever gesticulation might be necessary to give effect to his reading. He was evidently desirous to impress and gratify his audience, though more I think on his own account than on mine. I noticed that he particularly addressed himself to Vickery. As the author, I was out of court, so to say; Tony was a young man from whom critical opinion was hardly to be expected; moreover, he was clearly a fast friend of the writer's, a partisan bound to applaud under any circumstances. But Vickery could be considered in the light of an unprejudiced spectator; an experienced playgoer who had seen Mrs. Siddons, and who entertained sound opinions as to the fallen state of the stage.

"Our young friend's work," began Mole, turning to Vickery, "is entitled the Daughter of the

Doge. It is a poetic tragedy in five acts of very considerable length. I may say at once, before I read a line of it, that it will want cutting—a good deal of cutting indeed, to suit it for representation. And in any case I much fear that the public taste is at present somewhat opposed to productions of this class.”

“I fear so too,” said Vickery. “People, now-a-days, only care for such things as *Timour the Tartar*. Is it at all in the style of *Timour the Tartar*, Mr. Nightingale?”

“Not in the least.” I felt hurt at the question..

“You could introduce real horses, perhaps?” suggested Mole. “Real horses would greatly assist the play.”

“The scene is laid in Venice, you will find,” I explained.

“I see; but I’m not sure that the audience would object to real horses on that account. Venice? Then you might certainly bring on real water. I think the house would quite expect real water, and feel disappointed if none was forthcoming.”

“The best place for real water is Sadler’s Wells. They’ve the New River close at hand, you know,” said Vickery. “If you really thought

of sending the play to the Wells, Mr. Nightingale, I've some little acquaintance with the manager, and I might possibly be able to help you in that quarter."

"Vickery lives at Islington, somewhere near the theatre," Tony whispered to me.

I said that I was quite satisfied the play was unsuited to Sadler's Wells. Already I felt that enough real cold water had been thrown upon the Daughter of the Doge.

The reading then began. Mole certainly took pains; he was deliberate and emphatic, but he often met with difficulties in the manuscript, and made random guesses at the words of the text, occasionally with ludicrous results. Moreover, his command over his voice was very uncertain. The husky cooing tone he adopted for the heroine, Bianca, was very disagreeable to me; and the ventral bass he employed for the villain Ludovico, had quite a burlesque air about it. He was altogether unconscious of this, however; he proceeded assiduously with much movement of his arms and varied play of his eyebrows. Now and then his hand descended upon the table with a heavy thump that imperilled all the glasses in the room; his gasps were very forcible, and his sudden starts

ended in his breaking the back of his chair. Still, I was dissatisfied with his reading. He was, I thought, far too pompous and ponderous: too "stagey" in fact. He understood the delivery of blank verse, but he had a staccato, syllabic style of utterance that seemed to me distressingly artificial. It was as though he were addressing himself to a vast auditory, and was determined that all should hear and comprehend him, even to the last man cracking nuts on the back bench of the gallery. Somehow I felt that all the poetry and tenderness with which I had laboured to invest my verse had been beaten out of it by Mole's strained and prodigious method of dealing with it. I thought I could really have done more justice to the work if I had read it myself. I was acquainted with its strong points. Mole seemed striving to give prominence to every line. I began to understand how much authors must inevitably suffer at the hands of actors—even the most zealous and anxious to content their dramatist. And I perceived, too, that the performance fully justified the opinion pronounced on a previous occasion in Featherstone-buildings. We were decidedly chargeable with "kicking up a row."

The reading was, to my thinking, a failure

altogether ; and yet it had its moments of triumph. Tony was good enough to applaud at every possible opportunity, and even old Vickery now and then permitted himself to murmur approval. At the close of every act Mole paused for refreshment, to dab his moist forehead, and to drain his glass. His exertions had undoubtedly been arduous. His face was streaming by the time he had arrived at the third act. He had found it necessary to remove his cravat and shirt-collar ; he had unbuttoned his waistcoat at an early period of the evening ; the last act he read in his shirt-sleeves, and without his boots. Indeed, if the tragedy had been of any greater length, he would, I believe, have divested himself of every article of clothing.

"I do like that poisoning scene in the third act," said Tony.

"Yes, it's effective," said Mole. "But you know we've had that business of changing the goblets on the stage before."

Vickery remembered its being done, in a play at the Haymarket, twenty years back.

I protested, what was perfectly true at the time, that I was not acquainted with any work in which such an incident occurred.

Vickery, I think, but I could not be sure, muttered a quotation from Sheridan.

"And then that description of Bianca strikes me as exquisite," said Tony.

"Yes, it's pretty," said Mole. "I think it would tell with the pit."

Tony began a quotation, but Mole would not permit him to finish it. He seemed determined that no one should recite but himself.

"Look where she stands, lit by the setting sun!
The rays seem o'er her golden head to dance,
As though they'd found a playground that they loved.
Whilst from her lambent eyes what gleams outshine!
Sweet summer lightning on an azure sky,
Flashes to love, not fear!"

"And further on," said Tony, "when Lorenzo relates how Bianca won his love."

Mole continued :

"Not hers those gaudy gifts, passion's excuse,
Those charms particular which men can count
Upon their fingers, reckon off by heart,
And know as coins which bought of them their love.
She strikes not, yet she captures ; for she weaves
Round the heartstrings, oh such a tendril net
Of fond endearments, gentlest kindnesses,
But cobweb threads at first, but which, in time,
Expand to cable's strength ! Like some soft bird,
On tree she builds a house within the breast,
And closely nestling there, all unsuspect,
Makes it her home for aye!"

But the most admired passage was in the speech of the dying Doge in the last act. Mole certainly spared no effort to give due effect to the scene in which this occurred. He even quitted his chair, stretched himself upon the floor, and rolled to and fro in great apparent agony, still keeping fast hold of my manuscript the while.

"If I were sure of the words," he said, "I feel that I could do a great deal with the dying Doge."

His writhings and contortions of face and limb were extreme. No doubt we were too near to them. He was still aiming at the edification and the applause of the man on the back bench of the gallery. I must say that he seemed to me to be grimacing extravagantly. In broken spasmodic accents he moaned:

"Here let me rest—where the sad solemn stars
Gleam down so wanly on me. Bianca!
Give me thine hand—wreath round me thy white arms.
Let my last knowledge be that thou art near,
My parting words and glances all be thine.
I'd much to say—but my mind wanders far
From earth. How dark it grows! Forgive me, child.
The day is gone; there's twilight on my soul!
As blind men walk I grope my way to death.
My life is ebbing from me, as the land
Fades from the vision of a drifting ship
Launched on a black and unknown sea!"

And at last he fell heavily back, closing his eyes,

and dropping his jaw in a very awful manner. Indeed, he had so far surrendered himself to the cunning of the scene, that it was with some difficulty he could be persuaded that he still lived. Upon Tony's proffering him a glass of punch he revived, however, and quaffed it in the attitude of the dying gladiator. For some time his voice was reduced to a mere whisper, his exertions had been so severe.

"I can see," he said, as he rose from the floor, "that your play contains a good deal of what we call 'fat' for a heavy tragedian. But it drags terribly in places. I don't see that your first act is wanted at all. The Doge doesn't come on, and Bianca is only talked about. Indeed, she's too much talked about all through. She really does very little. Ludovico, the villain, has got some good lines to deliver, and his scene with the bravos should be effective. I could do something with Ludovico. There's a touch of Mephistopheles about him that I rather like. But, really, Lorenzo is little better than a walking gentleman: a nice pair of legs in tights—there's nothing more needed for the part. The first and second senators are simply bores, and I should omit all that about the Adriatic. It's poetical, but the audience never care for mere poetry; they prefer to be without it. After all, you

know they come to the theatre to see and not to hear."

"If I may say so," remarked Vickery, "I think the work is rather calculated for perusal than performance."

I knew that he would utter some terribly cut and dried opinion of that kind. There are always people willing to give you the very thing you don't want. My tragedy was expressly devised for representation. To praise it on other grounds was, in truth, to censure it.

"I think it beautiful, simply beautiful," said Tony. "It's the only word I can employ to describe it. I congratulate you heartily, my dear Duke."

"Pray accept my congratulations also, Mr. Nightingale." Vickery allowed himself to be affected by Tony's ardour. "A most promising work, I'm sure; and containing much eloquent and poetic matter."

"And we're really greatly indebted to Mr. Mole for the admirable reading of the play. It was quite an intellectual treat of a high order—that's my view of it. Thank you, Mr. Mole." And Tony helped him on with his coat.

I, too, hastened to thank Mole for his labours.

They had not altogether contented me, but they merited recognition.

Mole accepted our thanks. He was thoroughly pleased with himself; but applause was agreeable to him. He sat apart for a little while, to grow cool, to recover his breath and his voice—so far as that was possible.

“It reminds me of old times,” he whispered to me. “I feel as though I’d been playing Richard. The finest character in the whole range of the drama for promoting perspiration. I used to do it upon barley-water. You haven’t such a thing here, perhaps. I’ll make beer do as well.”

Gradually he resumed his clothes and his chair at the table. Another bowl of punch was mixed. The conversation became general, and of a more convivial tone. My work was occasionally referred to, but it had ceased to be a leading topic. We entered upon a course of speech-making. I proposed the health of Mole. He replied in moving, in husky terms: referring affectionately to our long and firm friendship, and predicting for me a career of great distinction, though he indicated its direction but vaguely. The healths of Tony and Vickery were afterwards duly drunk. Subsequently I think we went through the list of

toasts usually proposed at public banquets. Much was said, chiefly by Mole, on the subjects of "The Drama," coupling with it the name of our host; "The Fine Arts," with which Tony was connected; and "Literature," which was somehow made to embrace "Law," and thus to involve Vickery. Certain loyal toasts were acknowledged by Mole, probably on the score of his being assistant to the king's serjeant-painter, and in such wise brought into obscure association with the crown. He could have had no better or more explicable reason for his returning thanks for "The Church," except that he had once, I remembered, been desirous of playing the part of a bishop; but he executed that self-imposed task with much appropriate gravity and dignity.

There was the pale light of coming day in the sky when Vickery volunteered the song of Post Meridian, and rendered that composition with unexpected skill, especially in regard to its more florid passages. Mole, thereupon, attempted the ballad of Black Eyed Susan with but indifferent success—he had forgotten the words, and his voice could not compass the music. It was soon after Vickery had expressed his regret that he had omitted to bring his flute with him—I was quite unaware that he

ever performed upon that instrument, and I did not, I own, deplore its absence—that our little party separated.

Mole's legs seemed to fail him somewhat as he went down the stairs, but with Vickery's help he accomplished the descent in safety. Their voices sounded noisily in the silent quadrangle of the inn. As I looked from the window I could see them standing in the grey morning twilight with a somewhat disreputable air of revelry about them. They were very jocose together. Surely they were not laughing over my tragedy? It could not be.

Mole, in his effusive way, was promising Vickery orders for any London theatre he might elect to visit. He was expressing the pleasure he had experienced in meeting with Vickery—he hoped they might come together on many subsequent occasions. He had been delighted with Mr.—he forgot the name for a moment—yes—of course—thank you—Vickery—Mr. Vickery's intellectual conversation—with his very sound sentiments regarding the present condition of the stage. Then there was more jesting between them, and Vickery laughed—laughed out more boisterously than I could have conceived possible.

They were rousing the night porter of the inn,

asleep in his lodge. They had some difficulty, apparently. They were crowing like cocks! Vickery's imitation was much the better of the two. Then came the noise of the porter unlocking the wicket door; its slamming behind them; the pattering of their steps on the pavement without; and all was still.

"It's been capital fun altogether," said Tony, leaning back languidly in his chair. "I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. But—it's the heat—the smoke—the excitement, I suppose; I never felt so tired before."

His face was flushed, and his eyes were bright; yet he looked thoroughly jaded, and his hand, I noticed, as I parted from him, was tremulous and burning hot.

How well I remember that evening! I date from it my abandonment of my hopes as a dramatist. I locked up my tragedy in my desk and did not look at it, scarce thought of it, again, for many years; and—a far more important matter—I also date from it my first perception of the gravely declining health of my friend Tony. The poor boy was really very ill.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOMEWARDS.

"Yes, they're pretty enough, Mr. Nightingale, and clever, decidedly clever. You possess taste, I think, for this kind of thing."

I was exhibiting a portfolio of my drawings to Sir George. His approval gratified me extremely.

"Show me your original drawings; the copies are of less importance. Yes; fanciful and pleasant, with a delicate sense of colour. There are technical deficiencies, of course; your eye wants training, and your hand is oftentimes unsteady. That leg, for instance, is sadly out of drawing, and the whole figure is deficient in proportion. Still it's graceful and animated. You should be capable of better things."

He was paler even than usual; he spoke languidly, and appeared to be suffering somewhat. But his manner was very kindly and courteous.

"If art were really to be your vocation—but you have decided otherwise, as I understand—I should advise your becoming a probationer in the schools of the Royal Academy." He explained the formal proceedings necessary for the attainment of that end. "There is nothing like skill and correctness as a draughtsman. Students are too apt to fly to the brush before they have well learnt how to ply the crayon. The Antique and Life Schools at Somerset House are most admirably conducted, and of the greatest value to the young artist. I speak from experience when I dwell upon the importance to a painter of a thorough and intimate knowledge of drawing."

I thought of Mole's treasonable whisper to me :
"The fact is, Sir George can't draw!"

"However," he continued, with a smile, "you are not to be an artist by profession, it seems, Mr. Nightingale. Happy man! Only an amateur. Still, it's as well to be a good amateur as a bad one."

I was then emboldened to ask if there was any vacancy in his studio for another assistant. He appeared to be surprised at my inquiry, but in no degree offended.

"Are you speaking for yourself or for another?"

What! you are a patron? You have already a protégé? It's rather soon, is it not? If it was on your own account that you applied I should not hesitate. I don't scruple to say that you could be of service here. In any case I will see what can be done. I will try to count your friend as my friend. Mr. Wray, you say? I don't know the name. A nephew of Mr. Monck's? He didn't like the law, and so—— Well, that proves his possession of some taste, at any rate. And you vouch for his ability? Well, I'll speak to Mole about it. If I should forget, don't scruple to remind me. You will come and see me again shortly, of course. You must remember, however, that the London season is now nearly over. In a little time we shall be nothing like so busy in the painting-room as we are at present; but, later in the year—— You are much bent upon this thing? I see you are. I'll take the merits of your friend, Mr. Wray, for granted, then. My dear Duke, I'll see what can be done."

It was the first time he had ever called me "Duke." He shook hands with me cordially as I quitted him, after thanking him again and again for his kindness. He seemed amused at my excessive, and perhaps rather clumsy, expressions of

gratitude. There was nothing cynical in his smile this time, however; it seemed to be thoroughly sympathetic. Yet he was in some pain the while, I felt. I noted that there were dark circles round his eyes, and that he once or twice pressed his white hands upon his brow. His lips were colourless, and his eyes without lustre.

With his office coat, Vickery seemed to have resumed the character in which I had first known him. He was no longer the convivial Vickery, the playgoer, the singer of *Post Meridian*, with a hint at performances on the flute, that he had appeared in Tony's chambers; he was again Mr. Monck's manager, intent upon legal affairs. He seemed anxious that I should forget that I had ever seen him under any other conditions. I found him fixed in his usual place, and hard at work on the morning following that night of excitement and revelry. His aspect bore no trace of the recent festivities. Some brief reference to the event he did permit himself, however.

"A droll man your friend Mr. Mole; yet I should say a man of great abilities, Mr. Nightingale; and very versatile; uncommonly versatile, to be sure. A most pleasant evening. And your tragedy; it quite took me by surprise. Really a

very able work, if I am competent to form an opinion. And now, I think, we must really push on with that Supplemental Bill. It's been settled by counsel, and it's considered important that it should be filed before the Long Vacation, which is now—time flies so—close upon us. Precisely.”

He did not again speak of our famous symposium of poesy and punch, song and oratory. Yet now and then, I think, thoughts of it recurred to him with a genial warming influence. I observed him unconsciously chuckling over his writings; strange lights gleamed in his cat's-eyes at intervals, and unaccountable smiles, the uneasy ghosts of departed merriment, for some time haunted his grim old visage.

It had been arranged that the arrival of the Long Vacation should bring me some respite from my professional studies. I was to enjoy a brief holiday, and to visit my relations at Purrington. Vickery did not view this project very favourably. “It seemed a pity to lose so much valuable time,” he said. “We usually employ the vacation in making out our bills of costs. That's an important practical part of a lawyer's business, Mr. Nightingale. In point of fact we're nothing without our bills of costs. You can't learn too soon how to

make them out, Mr. Nightingale. It's really a great thing to know how to charge a client." Notwithstanding, I determined to avail myself of the opportunity for a holiday.

Indeed, I longed to be at home again. I was growing weary of London, its heat, and smoke, and dust. I pined for pure, fresh, exhilarating air, for the cheering sight again of our open wide-stretching down country, with its exquisite wavy lines of far horizon, fading and melting into the soft sweet tints of the distant sky. Chimney-pots and pavement had become odious to me. I reproached myself with having insufficiently prized my home at the farm-house. I had quitted it with undue eagerness and unaccountable lightness of heart. For months I had almost forgotten it. My letters to my mother had been, if not less frequent, certainly less supplied with information than they should have been. I had sometimes found it rather a task and a tax to write at all. Now all this was changed. I felt that I had much, very much, to say to the dear old home-folk, and I longed, greatly longed, to be with them once more. The Down Farm seemed to me a sort of Paradise, from which I was unfairly excluded. I dreamt of it. Plainly before me appeared its homely red-

brick face rising from its hollow in the tender green down, like a robin peering from its nest, with the belt of murmuring firs, Orme's Plantation, in the background; the dun-purple old barn with its ragged grey thatch; the corpulent wheat ricks; the verdant water meadows running down towards the silvery Purr; with Reube's fold and thriving flock, and the musical sheep-bells chiming pleasantly about the still landscape bathed in sunlight. I was home-sick for awhile; out of simple fickleness it might be. But in truth I was a little jaded with my town life. As I looked in my glass—I was often thus engaged now—chiefly in search of whiskers I think—I noted that there was quite a London pallor on my face, and something of a London hollowness about my cheeks. At any rate, I could no longer, on the score of my aspect, be accurately described as "a regular yokel." And to a country-bred youth London was now in its most trying season. The heat was stifling; there was no escape from the glaring scorching sun; its torrid rays were reflected and multiplied infinitely by windows, roofs, and paving-stones; there was not air enough, or there were too many breathing it; the great city in the dog-day weather seemed turned to carrion and cor-

ruption, and was most malodorous; even night brought no relief, for the darkness came down oppressively, in thick and heavy folds, like a suffocating pall.

I had planned to take Tony with me into the country, in part because I so greatly prized his companionship, but also because I felt the change would surely benefit his ailing health. At my instance my mother had written to him begging him to journey with me to Purrington. He hesitated a little, for he thought the *Milliner's Magazine* had claims upon his presence in town. I then explained to him the good prospect there was of his obtaining employment of a more worthy kind in Sir George's studio. This greatly delighted him. With characteristic alacrity he gave up colouring the fashion-plates for *La Mode*, and forthwith began to entertain very favourable opinions on the subject of portrait-painting. "Do you know," he said, "I think I've rather underrated it, hitherto. Painters of history, or those aspiring to be painters of history, are, perhaps, rather apt to underrate portrait-painting. And yet there's surely a great deal to be said for it. There have been very great portrait-painters. Raffaello, you know, painted portraits, and Titian and Tintoret, and, of course, Rubens

and Vandyck, and a score more of really the greatest names in art. I think I could carry the thing beyond Sir George; his method wants elevation; I could supply an element of the grand style that would be of extraordinary advantage to his art. I am sure I could be of very great service to him. I quite look forward to working in his studio, and in a quiet way promoting the regeneration of portrait-painting. It has been great in the past, even here in England; why should it not be great again in the future? I should be quite content to allow him the credit of my exertions. I am unambitious—humble-minded. It will suffice me to know that one or two, including, of course, yourself, my dear Duke, to whom I never can be sufficiently grateful for this and a thousand other kindnesses—I shall be well satisfied, I say, if but one or two share my secret, and recognise in me the real reformer and benefactor of British portraiture.”

I had seen Rachel Monck again. It was on the eve of my quitting town. I was impressed anew with the winning grace and repose of her aspect and manner. Yet she looked very sad, I thought; her lips and eyelids trembled, and she pressed her hand upon her brow. The action had become habitual with her. I feared that Mr. Monck's

state of health had given her new alarm. But it was not that ; he was even better, she said, than he had been for some days past. I was soon to know what had distressed her. She handed me a little packet ; it contained five guineas.

"You meant kindly, Mr. Nightingale, I'm sure," she said, in rather a troubled voice, "when you lent this money to Tony with a pretence that it came from me. But please don't do so again. You cannot think how deeply you have distressed me. I have seen my cousin. He would not come to me ; so last night I took courage and went to find him at his chambers. I learned from him of what you had done. It was not right ; it was not fair to him or to me."

I was much grieved. I could scarcely find a word to say.

"Pray believe I did it for the best, Miss Monck," I murmured. The thought that I had incurred her displeasure was very painful to me.

"We are too much in your debt already, Mr. Nightingale," she said, "and this was not really kind. If Tony, poor boy, was in want, the fact should not have been kept from me. I am not so poor but I could have helped him ; at least I would have tried my best to help him. He has been

hardly used, I know. He has been made to share in our misfortunes when they should, in truth, have been kept far from him. But there was no intention, indeed there was not, to deal unjustly by him. My poor father——”

Her voice trembled, and then seemed to fail her altogether. I was powerless to assist her, and I took shame to myself that I was standing dumb and motionless beside her, noting the while her crimsoning cheeks, her falling tears, her confusion, and suffering.

“I do trust,” she resumed, as presently she grew calmer, “that all will yet be well, and that Tony will receive in full all that is due to him—to the very last farthing. Meanwhile, a little patience is all I ask of him. He will not grudge me that, I know. And you, Mr. Nightingale——”

“Pray forgive me, Miss Monck. I am sensible of my misconduct. I deeply regret it. Pray believe I am sufficiently punished in the thought that I have pained, offended you—merited your anger, indeed.”

“No, no, Mr. Nightingale, it is not so bad as that,” and she smiled most exquisitely through her tears.

I longed to fall at her feet.

"Indeed, I did not force myself into his confidence."

"I am sure you did not. There could be no need. Poor Tony!"

Her words reproached me; though perhaps she had not meant that they should.

"I knew that he was a little pressed for money. I had some to spare, he would not borrow of me——"

"That was so like him! Of course he would not borrow of you."

"But it seemed so hard that I should not help him, when I could. And so—— Say you forgive me, Miss Monck?"

"There is no need for my saying so."

"But there is, Miss Monck. It will relieve me so much to hear from your own lips——"

"I forgive you with all my heart, and I thank you. You are only charged with being too kind. It is not a grave offence, nor a frequent. Only, there are some kindnesses we must not, and cannot, accept even from you, Mr. Nightingale."

Her words and her manner of speaking them thrilled and rejoiced me indescribably.

"He does not know, even now, that it was you

that helped him. It will be better, I think, that he should not know."

"Much better," I said.

"He thinks the money really came from me. I did not undeceive him. Somehow, I am jealous of any one's helping my poor boy but myself. It may seem to you a foolish fancy, perhaps; but you cannot know how dear he is to me. As I have told you, I have no living relative but Tony and my father. Naturally I cannot bear that any one should come between us to part us, or to seem to part us. You will remember this, I am sure, Mr. Nightingale, and humour my whim, if you like to think it one. He is going with you into the country, he tells me, for some weeks. I am glad of it. It will do him good, I'm sure. He wants change sadly. I was pained to see how pale and thin he looked. He has been working too hard, I fear. Poor boy, it's cruel, it seems to me, that he should have to work at all. You see, I am not really distrustful of you, Mr. Nightingale. My confidence in you is most complete. I surrender my poor boy into your keeping. You are his friend and very dear to him, as he has told me again and again. He is proud of your friendship, and I am glad, indeed, that he has found a friend in you. Only

please take care of him, and bring him safe and well back to me."

Her manner was almost playful, yet there was something curiously plaintive about it too. Her lips smiled, but her eyes were tearful, and there were melancholy notes in the animated music of her voice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE FARM AGAIN.

I WAS quitting the room when she said: "A moment more, Mr. Nightingale. You are going home to see your friends again. I hope sincerely you may find them well, that you may enjoy thoroughly your brief holiday with them. But it is right that you should consider again a matter upon which I spoke to you some months since. I mean, of course, your position here. I am still painfully conscious that you have not been fairly dealt with; that, owing to my father's unhappy illness, and to the confused state of his affairs, you have not received the attention that was justly your due. Now if you, or your friends acting on your behalf, should decide——"

But I would hear no more. She was merely renewing her former proposition to the effect that my articles should be cancelled or transferred. I

could but repeat my assurance that I was perfectly content, that I would not have the existing arrangement disturbed on any account. I expressed myself with an ardour and promptitude that much surprised me when I came to reflect upon the matter afterwards. I believe I stated that I was devoted to my profession, which certainly was not strictly true. The fact was that my allegiance to the law was, for the time, comprehended in my devotion to Rachel. Her father's articled clerk, I had an excuse for being near her, for seeing her when occasion offered, for serving her if I possibly could. If I quitted his office, I quitted Rachel: condemned myself possibly to part from her for ever. The thought of such a thing was quite unendurable to me.

She was amused, I think, at my display of fervour. Yet it gratified her, and she was grateful for it, I am sure. That it, in truth, signified love, never once occurred to her. Of this I feel persuaded. There seemed no suspicion of coquetry in her nature, no sort of desire to win admiration or move homage. She was distinguished by an exquisite modesty and pure humility of nature. She was content to lead a life of seclusion and laborious duty, perfectly unconscious that aught

MEETING MR. NIGHTINGALE.

...the slightest applause or even
of any kind on the part of any one.

She took hands with me with great kindness
... The tender sweetness of her smile
... my heart strangely. She could never
... I knew. Yet how worthy she was of
... love!

From Mr. Vickery I received a farewell injunction
... a characteristic sort. He bade me return
... as I could, refreshed and invigorated by
... my holiday, and prepared to undertake an enormous amount of copying work in readiness for next Michaelmas Term.

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your due. Now if you, on my
your behalf, should decide—

I called upon Sir George, but I saw him only
for a few minutes. A post-chaise was at the door,
and he was about proceeding to the Royal Pavilion.
... as I understood.

He hoped I might enjoy myself, and mentioned
... he had planned for a holiday himself. His journey
... pleasure, he gave me to understand,
... home, you say? Well,
... home."

But I would hear no more of it for you, Sir George
renewing her former proposition
my articles should be cancelled

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she did merited the slightest applause or even observation of any kind on the part of any one.

She shook hands with me with great kindness as we parted. The tender sweetness of her smile gladdened my heart strangely. She could never be mine, I knew. Yet how worthy she was of my utmost love!

From old Vickery I received a farewell injunction of a characteristic sort. He bade me return as soon as I could, refreshed and invigorated by my holiday, and prepared to undertake an enormous amount of copying work in readiness for next Michaelmas Term.

I called upon Sir George, but I saw him only for a few minutes. A post-chaise was at the door, and he was about proceeding to the Royal Pavilion at Brighton, as I understood.

He hoped I might enjoy myself, and mentioned that he longed for a holiday himself. His journey was not one of pleasure, he gave me to understand.

"You are going home, you say? Well, it's something to have a home."

"Can I do anything for you, Sir George? Can I deliver any message for you?"

He turned upon me rather sharply I thought.

"Message? No, I've no message to send. I

never send messages." He paused musingly. "No, I've no message to send, Duke," he repeated in gentler tones. "I hope, as I said, that you may enjoy yourself. Make the most of your time. You'll come and see me on your return?"

"Certainly, Sir George."

"You promise me? Mind, I count upon you." He fixed his dark eyes intently upon my face. "So, that's well. Good-bye, Duke. Stay—that friend you spoke to me about? I forget his name—I've seen nothing of him."

I explained that Tony was going with me into the country.

"Well, he must come to me on his return. You understand? Bring him with you, and introduce him. Don't forget. Good-bye, again."

He bowed, smiled, and hurried away.

We journeyed down to Dripford by the early coach from the Golden Cross. At the door of that inn I saw again the pimpled waiter. He was yawning to an extent that distorted his features painfully, and brought tears into his eyes. Apparently he did not recognise me. The coachman did, however; or pretended to. He nodded in a very friendly way, and observed that it was "a niceish day for going down."

"Let's see," he added, "you're for——"

"Dripford."

"Dripford, of course. I shall forget my own name next. I knew you weren't going through." He examined his waybill, thrust it into his pocket, and drew on his driving gloves, assuming as he did so a stooping attitude convenient for running his eye over the hocks of his team. "Better put that fish-basket in the front boot, William. All right behind there? Sit fast, gentlemen. Let 'em go, William." And we were off.

It was a pleasant day, with a light west wind blowing; threatening rain, the passengers agreed, but no rain fell. The clouds hung low, but in broken masses, allowing cool shadows to mottle the view, while here and there broad shafts of silvery light descended upon favoured places in the landscape. Very remote objects were invested with curious distinctness, and distant weathercocks upon church steeples and country houses were set sparkling like diamonds.

I remember discussing with Tony how such a variegated sky could best be represented upon canvas. Our talk of smalt, indigo, madder, Naples yellow, and warm glazing, perplexed our neighbours very much.

Tony was pale and wore a fatigued look. Yet he was in capital spirits. He seemed thoroughly to enjoy our journey along the beautiful western road. I could not but notice a certain tremulous movement of his hands, however; as though from an involuntary nervous excitement in excess of his strength to control.

"I did not sleep very well last night," he said, in answer to my inquiring looks. "I was up late packing; and tired myself too much. But I shall soon get well and strong again. Already I feel ever so much better. The sight of the country is wonderfully cheering, especially to one who has seen so little of it as I have."

I had told him all about the Down Farm and its inmates. I had prepared him for the simple homely ways of our quiet household, informing him thoroughly of what he was to expect, and what he was not to expect. I assured him, however, of the kindest welcome.

"You need not tell me that," he said, simply. "They'll welcome me on your account, my dear Duke, never fear. By-and-by I'll try to make them like me a little on my own. For my part I seem to know them well already, and to like them very much indeed. I only hope they won't expect

too much from me, and that they quite understand what a very commonplace and insignificant sort of young fellow I really am."

Old Truckle met us at Dripford in charge of a chaise, or rather a light cart, with my uncle's name upon it in thin white letters. In this vehicle we proceeded with our luggage towards Purrington; not very rapidly, so as to spare the horse; not the old chestnut—he, I learned, had gone lame and been turned out to grass with but a remote prospect of his ever resuming work again.

"Maester Duke?" said Truckle, doubtfully, as we met. "Why I should na' ha' known thee. Thee be'st changed so somehows. I thought it was one of they Lunnon chaps at virst. Thee looks main thin I be thinking, and as yaller as a claut." I may explain that "claut" is our country name for the marsh *ranunculus*. "Ees I be purely, thankee, and th' old ooman too, and all up at varm."

It was delightful to me to hear once more the ring and twang of the old Purrington speech and accent.

"They'll be main glad to see thee again at varm, I'll warnd" he continued. "Thee'll be in time for harrest; and as good a crop of wheat we got this year as heart could wish. And there's

barley in the ten yacker field out ayont the plantation as is a zight for zore eyes. Ees, sir, Rube be tidy, and Kem. Old Thacker be dead dree (three) months gone. 'Twere drink as killed un, volks zay. But I dunno. Thacker were an old man. 'Twere old age moast like; but volks likes to call un drink, shim (it seems). For zartin, one kills as much as t'other un, I be thinking. Ga oot." This was to the horse.

Truckle, I judged, had refreshed himself with a pint of the strong beer at the Ram Inn, or he would hardly have been so liberal of speech. He touched his hat now and then as he spoke, a novel proceeding on his part, which I took to be a tribute to my advance in years and stature. He glanced at Tony, but did not venture to address him. For his part Tony had comprehended little of Truckle's observations. Our dialect was so new and strange to him.

The leisurely way in which he proceeded on the road towards Purrington contrasted forcibly with the rapidity and bustle of our journey to Dripford. We had entered a region in which time seemed of little account, and hurry unknown.

There was the red-orange flush of a late summer sunset suffusing the uplands as we drew near to the farm-house. Beacon Mount in the distance seemed

bathed in golden light; the firs of Orme's Plantation, and the woods enshrouding Overbury Hall, were dyed rich crimson and deep purple, while already over the hollows of the down there floated the cool grey haze of early twilight.

Soon I could descry figures standing at the farm-gate looking for our approach. There was my uncle in a black hat; and my mother close beside him, resting upon his arm, as it seemed; and Kem, surely that was Kem, a little in the rear of them, waving a handkerchief or an apron. Now they were advancing to meet us.

"My Duke; my boy!" and my mother's arms were tightly wound round my neck. But for a moment—then she was greeting Tony—still clasping my hand, however. It was long before she seemed able to loosen her hold of it. It was only by touch, as I judged, that she could assure herself of my presence at home again. She said but little. Her eyes expressed the tenderest things, however, and her trembling fingers, as they interlaced mine, were most eloquent.

"Welcome home, Duke," said my uncle in his composed, kindly way, and he turned to Tony. "I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Wray. I hope we may be able to make your stay with us pleasant to

you. Let me bid you welcome to our old farmhouse." They shook hands heartily. My uncle went to speak to Truckle about the luggage or the horse.

"Kem!" I said. She was laughing and crying at once, with a shamefaced air, wringing her apron as though she had been washing it. I kissed her hot rough red cheek; there were tears trickling over it. The good soul hadn't a word to say. She stood somehow in awe of me, I thought. When she found speech at length it was to address me for the first time in her life as "Mr. Duke." Presently she added: "And a man growed! Blessee, I be terrible glad to see thee again, to be sure!"

"You had a pleasant journey? The day proved most fortunate. But you must be very tired and very hungry."

And so saying my mother led us into the house.

It was exactly as I quitted it. I went from room to room in quest of change, as it were, yet finding none. I seemed to have been absent but for half an hour or so. How well I remembered everything! How all seemed to come back to me! True enough I had been away, after all, but a very few months. Still it was at a period of existence when experiences, hopes, thoughts, and deeds, crowd and

thicken about one, assuming curious importance and significance; when one seems, so to say, to live long in a little while. Life in its transition stage between boyhood and manhood brims with incidents, is closely packed with events. Memory is then very fresh; hope is abundant. Youth imparts something of its redundant fervour and vitality to all it approaches. Everything I saw was connected with a thousand recollections, was part of my childhood, of myself.

I found myself looking into the mirror in the little room, once devoted to my study of my lessons preparatory to the coming of Mr. Bygrave, half expecting to see reflected there in the old pantomime way the magnified head of a little boy. It was almost with surprise I found there displayed, still with exaggeration and distortion, a much older face, thinner and graver, with the fluffiness of incipient whiskers just visible on the cheeks and jaw-bone.

"My dear Duke," said my mother, pressing her hand caressingly on my shoulder. "How tall you grow! But it wasn't that I wanted to say. Your friend——"

"Tony? What of him? You'll like him, mother, I'm sure of it."

"Of course I shall like him. But, do you know, I think he's very ill."

"Poor Tony! He's always pale, and just now he's tired, I dare say."

"He's very ill, Duke." And she shook her head sadly.

So she took Tony specially under her protection. It was her way. Her tenderness for the weak and suffering was extreme. I remembered how in times past my childish ailments had moved her to a display of intense affection that otherwise she had endeavoured studiously to suppress. It was enough for her to know that Tony was an orphan, to think him suffering; she took him to her heart at once. I saw that she was bent upon making quite a pet of him.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE YOUNG GENTLEMEN FROM LONDON."

I soon found that my absence and my London experience had much enhanced my importance at Purrington. I was no longer slightly alluded to as "that boy of Mrs. Nightingale's;" I was now reverently regarded on all sides as "young Mr. Nightingale." As to my professional status, vague ideas prevailed; the more general opinion held that I was properly to be described as "a counsellor." There was much curiosity to see me in church on Sunday morning; especially, I understood, on the part of the Miss Rawsons. My mother, I remember, as we walked home over the down, was severe in her criticism of the demeanour of those young ladies during service; "those Rawson girls," as she described them, denouncing their conduct as "quite brazen-faced." In the matter of dress, I think, for some time, I set the fashions among the young

men of the neighbourhood. They were unaware that but a little while since I had myself been viewed by London eyes as "a regular yokel." Tony also excited much attention. A blue satin stock he wore was the subject of general remark; and his silver-topped ebony cane, with the silken tassels, won extreme admiration. I told him so; when he whispered, "If they only knew that I had once raised five shillings upon it at the pawnbroker's!" In Purrington conversation, I found we were usually bracketed together as "the young gentlemen from London."

But if by my absence and advance in years and stature I had gained thus much, I was soon to find that I had also lost something. Kem, Reube, and other of my old associates on the farm, were no more to me what they had been. I left them friends; I found them servants. Division had come between us. Honestly, I do not think the fault was mine. But their old-world sense of class distinctions was very strong; they persisted in assuming an attitude of humbleness in regard to me. Of their real kindness and affection I could not doubt; but somehow, these could not now find expression quite in the old way. I was vexed to see how often Reube touched his hat to me. I did

not need such homage. Yet I could not tell him so without paining him; for he was but performing what seemed to him his duty. The difference there lay between the boy Duke and the man, "young Mr. Nightingale!" If I induced him to talk about his sheep with something of his old freedom, it was but for awhile. He soon fell back again into respectful reserve. I spoke of our old visit to Dripford Fair, but failed to draw from him much converse on the subject.

"Ees, I minds un well," he said, "but I had a zight better lot of lambs this zeason, zir."

Perhaps one reason for his uncommunicativeness was to be found in the fact that his old rival, Garge, had left the neighbourhood; dismissed from his employment with impeachment of his honesty, as I understood. Reube was thus deprived of what had been to him a main theme of discourse. He was too generous to be loquacious in regard to a fallen and departed foe.

"There a' be gone, and I bain't zorry for un; but I doan't want to betwit (taunt) un vor what a's done, or to bear malice anont un. We was allus atwo (divided), and a' was terrible attery (angry) wi' me, times and times; but moast like I shan't

zet eyes on un more. Garge wun't come anigh this country agen, I'll warnd."

And there were no more gossips for me over the kitchen fire with Kem. It seemed that once suspended they could not possibly be resumed. If I lingered in the kitchen now, Kem dusted a chair for me with her apron. She would not be seated in my presence. Our old sense of equality had gone with my childhood. The tenderest affection for me beamed in the good soul's eyes, but somehow duty and respect now fettered and hindered her show of friendship. She was afraid of taking a liberty and giving offence. In good sooth her fears were without warrant in fact. But they would not be allayed. Some talk I did have with her, however.

"Well, when are you and Reube to be married, Kem?" I inquired, laughingly.

"Moastlike never, sir, I do think," she said. "Reube's a good, plain, honest man, and a spreath shepherd; I've ne'er a word to say agen him. He's a Methody, but I don't cast that at him. There's a many honest folks among the Methodys. My own mother was a Methody, as you may have heard tell, sir, though I'm a church-going woman myself, and allays have been. But for marrying

Reube, there, I dunno what to say about it. Marrying's like dinner, it seems to me; the longer one waits the less one cares for it. It's not a morsel of use having vittles set afore you when you've no appetite. An old woman, and that's what I'm getting, sir, can make shift to do without a husband; pertickly if she's never had narra one. It's the young girls as don't know what they want, and think as it's marriage; though oft-times they find they've guessed wrong, after all. That won't be my case, sir. I dunno as I care to marry at all. Women get like cats, I do think, sir—I don't mean in their clawing ways, though I've heard that said of 'em by folks as, perhaps, clawing would do main good to—but they get to care for places as much as persons. I couldn't leave the farm, sir, and that's the truth; nor the master and missus. They know me and I know them, and you too, Mister Duke, if I may make bold to say so. They've allays kind words, and thoughts, and deeds for me. Where could I go and find kinder? I can but say blessee and thankee; but, please God, I'll not quit the farm. I'll work for them, and bide with them as long as they'll let me, and that's the truth, sir. I've a willing heart and a strong arm yet, though my hair's grizzling. So you see, sir,

my home's here, and I don't care to be going further and faring worse, maybe, trying to make another home along with old Reube. I've told him so times and times. If he don't know my mind it's not for lack of my telling him of it, and if he's so terrible bent on marrying, why there's girls about in heaps for him to choose from. A wife's soon got by them as looks for one, and a rope's soon found by them as wants to hang theirselves. There—I've no call to speak—but there's girls about Purrington as wraps their hair up in papers o' night, and greases their heads with hog's lard, and sticks their feet into sandals, and carries parasols to afternoon church, as would marry the first man as axed 'em, a'most afore he had axed 'em; and pretty wives they'd mak, maybe, when all's told, as couldn't bile a tater nor a dunch-dumpling, nor set 'fore the good man after's day's work vittles as a Christian would care to put inside un. Reube can marry one of such if he's a mind to. I'll not say him nay. He's hearty welcome to please hisself. But I'll bide here, please God, 'long with the master and missus, and you, Mr. Duke, whom I've known since you was quite a little tiddling child, and loved as though you were my own babe born; though moast like I shouldn't say such things, seeing the man

you've grown to be, tall of your hands and main broad in the back, and a bit of whisker already sprouting on your cheek. You'll not mind my speaking so free, sir. 'Tis hard to break oneself of old ways all at once."

Dear old Kem! What could I do but heartily kiss her rough honest face! Still we were not quite on our old cordially intimate terms.

Tony was soon thoroughly at home in the farmhouse. His simple vivacity of speech and manner won upon his hosts very surely. His gay prattle, his bright looks, his airy gestures, were very new to my mother and my uncle. I seemed quite a heavy prosaic creature beside him. He avowed himself an arrant cockney, who had rarely quitted London, save upon brief excursions up and down the river—bounded, he said, by the Nore at one end and Twickenham at the other—and in the neighbourhood of Hampstead and Highgate Hills. Of our wild open country he was loud in praise. It was a sure way of securing favour; but certainly no such subtle motive influenced his speech. The farm-yard was an endless delight to him. "Do you know," he confessed to me, "I have scarcely ever seen a pig out of a pork-butcher's shop." He greatly admired my mother's garden; even to the daisies on the

lawn—serious disfigurements, in her eyes, to its due trimness of aspect. The clear, fresh, heather-scented air of the downs; the ripe corn-fields, golden seas rippling musically under each breath of the summer breeze; the verdant water-meadows, with the tiny river twisting and gliding amongst the lush herbage like a silvery snake; the stunted lopped pollards on its banks, flinging out their thin arms into the air, as though in agony at the mutilation they had suffered; the sheep flocking upon the hazy uplands; the browsing oxen gathering under the purple shadow of the hedgerows to escape the scorching of the noon-day sun; the tired team of farm-horses with plaited tails, and poppy-decked harness, the work of fond carter-boys, returning from labour; the flight of pigeons clustering upon the house-top; the hum and glisten of insects in the sunny air; all these and other common-places of our country-side were marvels and joys to Tony. Silently and curiously, with an amused expression of face, stirring round his snuff-box with his forefinger in his old way, my uncle watched him as though he were some strange creature of another order of existence. My mother never wearied of ministering to his comfort, of seeking for new sources of pleasure for him. I should have been

jealous of the bountiful love she seemed to extend to him, but that I began to know how large and full of treasure her heart really was, how inexhaustible her affection. And then her kindness to my friend, was it not an expression in some sort of her fondness for me?

He had made a capital sketch of the dun-purple old barn, and was about to undertake a drawing of the farm-house viewed from the upper down.

I was surprised how little I was questioned concerning my adventures and proceedings in London. The good folks were content to wait, I think—with that faith in the almost unsought action of nature which often distinguishes country dwellers—until I should see fit to relate to them upon the subject. Or they were wholly bent upon making my holiday as pleasant as might be, and viewed questions as implying in some way uneasiness, or even distrust. It seemed enough for the present that I was with them again—dear good souls—that they could see me, hear me again and clasp my hand. Concerning Mr. Monck, they could say little in the presence of his nephew Tony. I informed them that the lawyer was a great invalid, and able to take little share in the business of his office, but that he was well represented by his managing clerk, Mr. Vickery,

who had been with him a great number of years. "Poor Monck, I am sorry to hear such a bad account of him. I remember him a bold and hearty man enough," said my uncle. And then the matter dropped. Of Rachel Monck I said nothing. Tony I found had spoken of her to my mother. He enjoyed helping her to water her plants in the evening, and, the while, held long conversation with her. I sat with my uncle at the window, learning from him all the news there was to tell of the farm and the neighbourhood.

"I'm colouring nicely, like a meerschaum pipe," said Tony, laughingly. His pale cheeks had reddened somewhat under the action of the sun. It was but a varnish of health, I feared. He was far from strong; was soon fatigued. But his new way of life seemed very pleasant to him. He reproached me for having found farming dull. "What could you be thinking of?" he demanded. "I call it really exciting. I only wish I were a farmer. I'm not sure that I shan't go in for it, even now. I feel that there's the making of a very respectable agriculturist about me. I should really like to wear top-boots and to trudge over ploughed land. It's true that I've a difficulty in making out what the labourers say, though I admire the whirr

and drone and twang of their speech very much ; and swedes and turnips, and the various kinds of grain are so uncommonly alike, I find it hard to distinguish them. But I dare say I should get over that in time. And then how wonderfully interesting sheep are ! And getting in your crops, and going to market to sell them, really a man could not ask for more agreeable occupation ; and so picturesque, too ! ”

He went with me to see Overbury Hall and Park. We met by the way poor widowed Mrs. Thacker, who still lived at the lodge, and was profuse with her curtsies. She had seen nothing of his lordship, no, not for a long time past, she said, in reply to my inquiries ; and she shed tears over the memory of the late Mr. Thacker—not that, I think, he had been a particularly good husband to her. She declared that he had been, however ; and certainly she should have known.

The house and grounds looked dreary and neglected enough. But its old air of awfulness and mystery had gone from the place. At Tony’s request I pointed out the window of the room in which I had first seen Lord Overbury ; in which afterwards I had peered at him asleep, before the fire, with Rosetta beside him. How distant those

events now seemed to me, and of what slight significance! Tony was interested, however. He well remembered my narrative of the matter. And I could see that coming fresh to it the Dark Tower had still some trifle of magic for him, due perhaps to my old account of it. He was impressed by the scene it presented of desolation and decay.

But it vexed me to find him regarding the story of my infatuation, not as a thing completely passed away and done with, but as still possessing vitality and influence. He could not be persuaded that I did not still cherish, locked within the secret recesses of my heart, a fond passion for Rosetta. He was inclined to view me as a kind of Werther; and seemed anxious to sympathise with my supposititious anguish. I could not tell him the real truth: that I loved his cousin Rachel. He meant nothing but kindness; yet his tender regard for my departed passion was to me as a reproach. It made clear to me my folly. In truth, the wound in my breast I had deemed so terrible had completely healed; not a scar, not a trace of it, was now discernible. The love I had lavished so extravagantly had come back to me in full. I had even expended it afresh with increased profuseness. Was I by-and-by to think as lightly and scornfully of my

second love as of my first? Surely it could not be. Yet I felt that my past foolishness justified doubt of my present sincerity.

At his desire I pointed out the exact place of my meeting with Rosetta in the fir plantation; the road the farm-cart had taken in carrying her back to the Hall; the scene of my wanderings on that strange night when, after my stealthy visit to the Dark Tower, I had lost my way in the snow. A sense of shame oppressed me in rehearsing these old and insensate adventures; but they seemed to possess a curious interest for Tony. He would persist in accounting me a hero of romance on the strength of them.

"Hullo! If it isn't Master Duke! How do'st, my lad? Hearty? I be main glad to see thee again, that I be!"

Farmer Jobling was the speaker. I was slapped heavily on the back, and my hand was grasped and shaken with painful cordiality.

"So thou'st come from London to look at farm again and see the old folks at home? A man grown, to be sure, with hair on his face; a weak thin crop, maybe, but time and sun will do summut for it. When wilt come and see the old woman, and taste the strong beer again? Thou'lt be main

welcome at the Home Farm, and this young gentleman—your servant, sir—along with thee. And harkee, lad, why didst not send for that bit of money I spoke about? I had it ready, and would have sent it if I had only known where. Trust a lad for getting into mischief in London town. I'll go bail you've needed it a many times, only you were too shamefaced to let me know. But I'd have stood by thee, lad; I passed my word for it, and the matter of money was at your service, certain sure. Never mind; you may want old Jobling's help yet. Come over to the Home Farm. The sheep thrive mainly, my lad, thankee kindly, and I've a tidy crop of wheat. I've no call to be ashamed on't. We failed in turmuts, somehow, for want of early rain, and the pays (peas) is but poorish. You're going to the fight to-morrow, I suppose—you and your friend?"

"Fight! what fight?"

"'Tis to come off in Chingley Bottom they tell me. Hast not heard on't? It's 'twixt a young chap they call the Baker—one of old George Rumsey's sons—you must mind old George, he was my head mower in times past, but he got terrible bad with the rheumatics, and now he's laid up past work, poor old soul, in the poorhouse. I take him a

packet of snuff or a bit of bacca sometimes to cheer him up when I go by that way. His son Jack was a good-for-nought. I tried him as a carter-boy, but 'twas no manner of use. They 'prenticed him to the baker at Bullborough, but he wasn't there long; then he went away to work on the canal below Steepleborough; and now he's took to fighting, it seems, and they say is clever with his hands. I've backed him for a trifle, seeing he hails from this country-side; but I'm to lose it, I fear. All say he's overmatched, and that Gipsy Joe will be too many for him. The Mudlark he's called: a Portsmouth man, worked in the docks there, a hulking heavy-weight, hard as nails, and pretty nigh black as to colour, that'll take a deal of beating, as I hear, and'll make short work of young Jack. Anyways, I'm bound to go and see. You'd best come too, you and your friend. Tellee what; I'll drive you over in my four-wheel shay-cart. Is't a bargain? We can put the horse up in old Hickley's stable. Chingley Bottom's on his down-land. I know old Hickley well. He's got a niceish farm down there, and put by a goodish bit of money out of it, the old chap has. He's terribly fond of a fight, and he'll make us hearty welcome. You'll come? Be on the high land, then, near the chalk-

pit on the Lisford road, early to-morrow morning, and I'll pick you up in my shay-cart. Good-bye, my lads."

Public opinion of those days did not view prize-fighting so adversely as in later times. It is true that the law forbade such encounters as breaches of the peace; but as though satisfied with having pronounced upon the matter, it turned away its head or closed its eyes, and took little further trouble to carry its decisions into effect. To the world in general a fight was simply a spectacle, on the footing of a fair or a horse-race. My uncle expressed no surprise at the proposed visit to Chingley Bottom. He decided that pugilism had greatly degenerated since his youthful days, when he had attended a fight at Moulsey—which he described as something indeed like a fight—between Jackson and Jem Belcher, I think, but I'm not quite sure about the names of the combatants. Nor did my mother offer any objection. The men of her time of indisputable character had countenanced prize-fighting. It was in the nature of "sport," and therefore apart from feminine comprehension; but by no means on that account to be unfavourably judged. Besides, she knew that we were to be accompanied by good old Farmer Jobling, the

worthiest and friendliest of neighbours. She simply bade us come back safe and sound, promising that dinner or supper should be ready for us, return at what hour we might.

We duly met Mr. Jobling at the appointed place on the following morning. The dew-laden down was shimmering in the sun; there was a fresh breeze blowing; and the blue heavens were alive with the music of the birds.

"'Tis a trimming day for the fight," said the farmer; "not too bloomy. If young Jack can only win the toss, and not get the sun in's eyes!"

He had victualled the chaise as for a long voyage. Beneath the seat were piled packets of huge sandwiches; a vast spirit-flask bulged from his pocket; while at his feet stood a large earthenware bottle, full of strong beer. His clever cob drew us along at a capital pace. It was a pleasant drive over the down, although now and then the molehills jolted us considerably, and the chaise, so amply burdened, creaked again. Still the turf spared the cob's feet.

"There'll not be a stroke of work done this day upon any farm within ten mile of Chingley, I'll warnd," said Mr. Jobling.

And, indeed, as we approached the scene of action we could see the country people, smock-

frocked and leather-gaitered, streaming across the fields, through hedge and over ditch, pouring in from all quarters. At last, from an eminence a mile off, we looked down upon the assembly in the hollow—a dark irregular mass—like spoonfuls of gunpowder at the bottom of a bright green punch-bowl.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIGHT.

It was a lively scene, with something the aspect of a country fair. Open carriages, however, were driving up with streamers flying and music playing. The gentry were strongly represented upon the occasion. The uproar was great, indeed; although the crowd, with all its rudeness, seemed tolerably good-humoured. The hares, scared by the din in a place that must usually have been most still and lonely, were to be seen wildly scampering about the down. "That's the worst of a fight in this country," said Mr. Jobling, thoughtfully; "it brings about such a main lot of poaching. It's those Steepleborough chaps mostly. They can't set eyes on a hare but they covets un. I'd like to put my stick across some of their backs, I know. And there's a lot of lurching dogs about as I'd make short work of if I had my way. There's a

heap of blackguards as will have hare for supper to-night, biled up with cabbage and a bit of bacon, most like." The farmer entertained the opinions of his class; scorning town-dwellers, and especially those of Steepleborough, and regarding poachers as a kind of vermin to be exterminated as promptly as possible. But soon he forgot these prepossessions of his in his intentness upon the coming fray.

We were informed that the betting was much in favour of the Mudlark, but that the Baker had been heavily backed by his patrons and friends, and that a sum of something like a hundred thousand pounds depended upon the issue of the combat.

We had an hour or more to wait. It was now nearly noon, and the sun's rays were beating hotly upon us. We attacked Mr. Jobling's store of provisions with keen appetite, though he blamed us for making such slight inroad upon his prodigious sandwiches. Aided by the broad blade of a large clasp knife, he set us a good example, seeming to hustle his food into his capacious mouth, and lunge at it afterwards with his weapon, as though to make sure of its fate, with something of a sword swallower's relish for cold steel. The strong beer was almost lukewarm, but still it was refreshing, and of unquestionable quality.

Farmer Hickley was discovered: a white-haired old gentleman, with a Punch-like figure and a purple face, very loud of speech, and liberal of oaths. He interchanged hearty greetings with his friend Jobling, and welcomed us on his account. "Servant, young gentlemen, glad to see you," he said; and he asked, in a neighbourly way, after the health of my uncle. "I ain't seen him this many a long day; but I mind the time when he was a smartish young chap and rode well to hounds. That's over with him now, I s'pose, as 'tis with me. When you come to have gout in both feet you'll find you ain't the man you were." He wore list slippers, I noted, and was riding a very steady old dun pony. He begged us to call at his house before we turned homewards. He was very angry about poachers and trespassers—"There, they'll do me a sight of mischief before they've done, I s'pose," he said)—but otherwise he seemed well pleased that the fight should take place on his land, and grew highly excited as he spoke of the probable results. "I've backed the Baker for a trifle," he said. "The lad hails from this countryside, so I felt bound to. A spreath, sprack young fellow enough, with some science; but the weight and strength's all with t'other un. But they do cut

the time to waste, terri-bly, to be sure. Dang un, let 'em take and get at it, ding-dong; that's what I like to see!"

We secured a good standing place, looking down upon the roped ring of level untrodden turf, that seemed so specially green and fresh in the bright sun, and by contrast with the thick dark crowd surrounding it. There was an outer ring beyond, rudely marshalled and ordered by a band of pugilistic-looking functionaries wearing drab "box" coats, with highly-coloured "Belcher" wrappers round their necks, their hair very closely cropped, and their features exhibiting enduring traces of violent usage. They did not hesitate to enforce their orders upon unruly spectators by the administration of blows and kicks. I saw more than one white smock-frock soiled by a bleeding nose, or a wounded face.

There was a stir among the crowd; a buzz, a cheer, and then much excited hustling forward and swaying about. The combatants, complying with the prescriptions of such occasions, had flung their hats into the ring, following them forthwith, attended by their seconds and bottle-holders. There was still a considerable pause as they leisurely divested themselves of their clothes. They took

their time over this performance, as though they delighted to keep us in suspense as long as possible. I felt my heart sicken a little from nervous tension. I glanced at Tony; he had been rather silent for some time past, and was now deadly pale from excitement.

A strange gentleman, with an eye-glass screwed between his frowning brow and his inflamed nose—he was rather fashionably dressed, but his linen might have been cleaner and his chin more closely shaven—supplied me with information in regard to the more celebrated personages present; but I cannot be sure that his statements had any pretensions to accuracy. He seemed an expert in the matter of pugilism, however, and avowed (with a hiccup) that he had never missed a fight yet, and that he wished he might die if he ever did. He said that he had travelled down from London with a numerous party by the night mail, and had not slept a wink for eight-and-forty hours. That they had kept it up lively all the way, however, with a pack of cards, and as much gin and as many cigars as I liked to mention. That, arrived on the ground, he had freshened himself up with a draught of new milk, liberally “laced” with Jamaica rum. For the present, he stated, he had missed his friends, but

he hoped to find them again soon. His appearance was certainly not very reputable, and from behind its glass his blood-shot eye, shadowed by the curly rim of his fluffy, smeared white hat, glared at me in rather a sinister and sodden sort of way. Still he seemed anxious to favour me with some share of the fund of knowledge in his possession, and at such a time, in such a scene, I could scarcely turn a deaf ear to him. Indeed, I found his discourse decidedly interesting.

He pointed out among the gentlemen present the Duke of This, the Marquis of That, and—but in this respect I resolutely refused to believe him—a celebrated dignitary of the Church of England, wearing a red comforter and the fantail hat of a coalheaver, presumably by way of disguise. He fortified with an oath—if that, indeed, could be considered as of any fortifying effect, under the circumstances—the correctness of his statement. “The bishop’s like me so far,” he said, “he’s never been known to miss a fight yet. But he’s a first-rate Greek scholar they say. I’m not. He has the better of me there.” Further, he showed me a Mr. Egan, in a blue cravat spotted with white, whom he clearly regarded as the most gifted author of that period. He furnished, it seemed, a famous

weekly sporting newspaper with florid, almost poetic, accounts, of all the great prize fights. "And that man over there, that man in gold spectacles—you see? next to the gent with the green shade over his off eye—there, leaning over the rope at this moment—that's Bang-up Brown!" This seemed to be the culminating point of his intelligence. "You know Bang-up Brown, of course. Everybody knows Bang-up Brown."

To this hour I have never been able to ascertain who, and what, Bang-up Brown really was, why he was so called, or why everybody should be supposed to know him. Certainly I did not, and I have never found anybody who did, my interlocutor with the eye-glass only excepted.

There was a mixed noise of cheering and groaning. The pugilists had tossed "for the sun," it appeared, and the Baker had lost. "It's all over with poor young Jack, I'm main aveard," said Mr. Jobling. And now the combatants were led by their seconds to the "scratch," and there was a roar of applause as they shook hands, each grinning mirthfully, and then fell back in fighting postures.

I turned for a moment—there was a sudden movement in the crowd—to look for my stranger-friend with the eye-glass. But he had vanished.

I wished I could be sure, when I afterwards came to miss my purse and silk pocket-handkerchief, that they had not left Chingley Bottom in his possession. Fortunately, my loss was but trifling. It entailed upon me much ridicule from Farmer Jobling, however. "And you from London, and a lawyer, too ! I thought you'd ha' been a match for a pickpocket any day in the week."

"Look." Tony whispered to me. "The Apollo and the Hercules !"

Jack Rumsey, surnamed the Baker, was a slight-looking, cleanly-built young fellow, with a modest, simple air, and a cheerful countenance. His features were flattened somewhat, and his jaw very square. On the whole, however, his face was rather handsome and his figure most symmetrical. His light flaxen hair was cropped pretty close ; but it was naturally curly, and, short as it was, assumed something of the form of young lamb's wool, sitting in compact flat little rings all over his head. In the bright sun his smooth, fair skin shone like satin ; his muscles stirring restlessly beneath with the force and rapid elasticity of steel springs. Great natural grace attended his every pose and gesture, and he was surprisingly light and active in all his movements. Sometimes, I noticed, he quite uncon-

sciously—for what, indeed, should he know about such matters?—fell into the attitudes of classical sculpture. Tony, I found afterwards, had also observed this, and was much impressed by it. Our sympathies went wholly with the Baker. We viewed him as the champion of the county of our adoption. And we joined in cheering him.

But there was no escaping the conviction that young Jack had in Gipsy Joe, the Mudlark, a very formidable opponent. He was of lofty stature and great bulk, his skin of a tawny olive hue, and his fierce dark eyes glanced from under his beetle brows with a look of supreme confidence and assured triumph. His arms, as he stretched them forth on guard before him, were as the gnarled limbs of some giant oak. Presently he was whirling them about with the swiftness and mighty strength of sledge-hammers in full play.

Even the most enthusiastic supporters of the Baker felt some dismay as they observed the colossal proportions of his foe. What hope was there of their slim hero routing that sinewy stalwart savage? What were Jack's tactics to be? people inquired. He had excellent advisers, it was whispered, and had promised to follow implicitly their counsels. But what could the utmost skill and

science, even supposing Jack to have these at command, avail against that monster of strength? One blow from the Mudlark, it was urged, would quite demolish the Baker; who might defer his fate for some time, perhaps, but must surely succumb to it at last. While for any injuries young Jack's lithe arms might inflict upon his adversary, his strength might as well be tested upon a stone wall. Gipsy Joe could not be tired out or fought down; that was the general opinion. And if he once got the Baker in his power, as sooner or later he certainly must, why then the fight would be over forthwith, and the pretensions of Jack Rumsey and his backers very decisively silenced.

So the learned contemplated the issue of the encounter.

"I'm most aveard my money's clean gone," said Mr. Jobling, shaking his head forebodingly.

The severest critics could but detect one failing in the equipment of the Mudlark. His strength was not equally distributed, they alleged. His arms were mighty, indeed; but his legs—and certainly one of them curved suspiciously inward at the knee—were unequal to the support of the enormous bulk and weight of his body. Still his aspect was

most imposing. The betting was greatly in his favour.

I cannot venture upon any detailed narrative of the fight. It was fully chronicled at the time by Mr. Egan, I believe, with accurate particulars of its every incident. It was at first strangely interesting and exciting as a spectacle ; but it grew horrible as it proceeded. So Tony and I agreed when we afterwards came to compare notes ; but we did not avow our conclusions very publicly, lest we should be denounced as "milksons"—to youth a very dreaded term of opprobrium. It was divided into many "rounds," and occupied a considerable time. It was a struggle of skill and activity against stolid weight and enormous brute force. At first young Jack suffered severely ; yet he moved about with the grace and activity of a dancer in avoidance of the blows aimed at him, manœuvring to change his position so that the sun might fall on the face of his antagonist ; and though repeatedly struck to earth, appeared always to fall lightly, and to rise without serious injury. It did not seem to me that he ever encountered the full force of his antagonist's arm. Many of the Mudlark's most strenuous efforts were spent in air, and he now and then fell prone from the lack of sufficient resistance to the blows he

delivered. But the Baker was much disfigured ; his fair skin was soiled, and bruised, and bleeding. The green turf within the ring was now trampled black by the incessant movement of the combatants. The Mudlark exhibited few traces of injury ; there was a patch of bright scarlet on one side of his face, however, and a dingy-hued swelling had risen beneath his right eye ; moreover, he was now somewhat scant of breath, and he stood, I thought, less firmly upon his feet. The Baker was still alert and smiling, but with an ugly rent on his under lip. His system of warfare was soon made manifest. He avoided coming to close quarters as much as possible ; but whenever he could get through the guard of his foe he struck him full in the face. To do this, and fly back out of reach of a return blow, was a matter of some difficulty. But he fairly succeeded, and although his strength was plainly waning, his chances of ultimate triumph were, in the opinion of well-informed bystanders, steadily improving. He was encouraged by the uproarious cheers of his supporters, when his quickly darting fist alighted anew upon the brawny visage of Gipsy Joe, leaving behind it, as it invariably did, sure marks of havoc. Could he endure until the mashed face of the Mudlark had swollen so that he could no

longer see? It was horrible—it was sickening; and yet it possessed, I'm bound to say, certain fascinating elements of heroic audacity. Already Gipsy Joe seemed striking at random; flinging himself where he believed his antagonist to be standing, and receiving yet another desperate blow before he could recover an erect position. The battle was prolonged in the most brutal manner. During several of the closing "rounds" the Mudlark was understood to be quite blind and completely at the mercy of the Baker, who, anxious perhaps to terminate the conflict as soon as might be, did not hesitate to avail himself of his opportunities. At length the fight was formally declared to be over, and the defeated giant, blinded and bleeding, his face a hideous, featureless, pulpy mask, was led away, staggering and groaning, by his friends.

Prodigious acclamations announced the victory of young Jack Rumsey—the local favourite. He was panting as the blood was wiped from his wounds; a triumphant grin sat on his face; with the aid of his seconds, he was resuming his clothes.

"I've beat un," he said, simply, with a strong country dialect, as he pulled his shirt over his

head; "and I've won your lordship's money for ye."

He was speaking to a man leaning over the ropes. I started. I almost screamed with surprise. The man was Lord Overbury.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

I KNEW him at once, though he was certainly altered. He looked very much older, and was strangely dressed, in the glazed hat and shabby, many-caped drab coat of a hackney-coachman. A beard of some days' growth gave his chin something the look of a white scrubbing-brush with its bristles much worn. His appearance altogether was most neglected, soiled, and even squalid. He had been one of the Baker's chief backers I was informed, and was a considerable winner by the result of the battle. There was a large party with him of noblemen and gentlemen, it was rumoured—though, indeed, they scarcely seemed to be such. They were handing him various sums, in payment, I presumed, of the bets they had lost. They had no doubt been supporters of the defeated Mudlark. His lordship held in his dirty hands—which trem-

bled a good deal, and seemed bossy about the joints with gouty knots and swellings—a crumpled bundle of bank-notes. He was by no means sober, and from time to time ejaculated raucous shouts and inarticulate sounds of triumph. He was still cheering on the Baker to further efforts, and hurling maledictions at the head of Gipsy Joe. Now and then he struck out with his arm wildly in the air, swayed to and fro, elbowing the crowd, and seemed trying to execute some jubilant dance of a Red Indian pattern, uttering the while a hideous war-whoop. But for the support of the ropes of the ring, he would certainly have fallen prostrate on the sward.

“Lord Overbury,” I whispered in Tony’s ear, as I grasped his arm.

“Impossible! Why, the man’s mad!” And, indeed, he might well have thought so. But then he had never seen his lordship before, as I had.

We had been hustled by the crowd towards Jack Rumsey’s corner of the ring. There was much pressing forward to gain a nearer view of that champion. But he was now muffled up for departure, with a cold bandage round his left hand, which had suffered much from frequent sharp collision with the bones of the Mudlark’s face. A

handkerchief enfolded his forehead also, and a black patch of plaster concealed his cut lip. In his heavy "box" coat and swathing "Belcher" he had certainly abandoned all resemblance to the Apollo. He looked, indeed, a veritable ruffian.

"Good day, my lord, and thankee for all you've done for I," he said, touching his forehead respectfully. He was in his way a hero perhaps; but he was a hind too.

His lordship said nothing intelligible in reply, unless it was an imprecation. But he stared, laughed, staggered, and then thrust several of his bank-notes into the raw, battered, and puffed right hand of the pugilist.

There had been some jeering at the nobleman. But this was silenced now. It was perceived that he was the patron and friend of the Baker. There arose something of a cheer for him. He received it with supreme indifference.

The throng was now thinning rapidly. The spectators were departing on their homeward ways in all directions, stretching out in long lines over the open country like rays diverging from a star's centre. There was the hum of laughter and conversation in the air; quite in the distance a key-bugle, in the hands of an infirm performer seated

on the top of a four-horse coach, emitted strange discords. Carts and carriages were climbing the steep sides of the down, to regain the high road to Steepleborough. Gradually Chingley Bottom was regaining its accustomed look of extreme seclusion and tranquillity, with trampled grass, littered paper, and broken bottles, the only evidences of the recent fray and tumult. In an hour or two the scared hares and rabbits might safely resume possession of it.

Lord Overbury was left almost alone. He was standing rubbing his rough chin, muttering to himself, hiccuping, and now and then looking round him with lustreless drowsy eyes in a confused way, as though scarcely conscious of where he was, or of what had happened. Tony and I watched him from a little distance curiously, and with, on Tony's part, a sort of amazed repugnance. Mr. Jobling had gone in quest of his cob and chaise.

Suddenly a bank-note fluttered out of his lordship's hand, and was borne by the wind almost to my feet. I picked it up, and carried it to him.

"Something you've dropped."

He had difficulty in understanding me. But he took the note, almost snatching it from me.

"I didn't bet with you, did I? You're not one

of the Mudlark's backers? Dropped it, did I? Well, thankee, my lad. 'Twas honest to give it up, anyhow. But—I hadn't missed it. What a fool you were not to keep it! That's what I should have done in your case."

He spoke very thickly, interlarding oaths and laughs in his old way. Suddenly he stopped, and looked intently in my face. For a moment his maltreated senses seemed struggling to break through the sottish fog that enveloped and prisoned them. He made an effort to stand firmly, and, as it seemed to me, to reflect and remember. But his inebriety was too complete. He failed to recognise me, although certainly a flash of intelligence had for a second illumined his dull and darkened faculties. He glanced at me, and then at Tony, and then, waving aloft a flaccid hand, said, "I get to Chingley turnpike-gate over that down, I think!" stumbled away, cramming his bank-notes into his coat-pocket, and muttering thickly—his words, if, indeed, he uttered any, being probably independent of thought, and possessed of no clear meaning even to himself.

Some three hundred yards away from us, when he was half way up the grassy slope of the down, he stopped, turned, shouted, and shook his clenched

fist in the air. We failed to comprehend the significance of this proceeding, and decided that it had none.

"He is a satyr, and no mistake," said Tony; "and a very inferior specimen of that curious species. I seem to breathe more freely now he's gone. And he's Lord Overbury, and the husband of your Rosetta!"

My Rosetta, indeed! But I said nothing.

Mr. Jobling reappeared.

"We'll not go up to Hickley's house, this journey, I think, my lads. He's got the place full with a regular noisy party, from all I can hear. So we'd best get towards home. We shall be none too early as 'tis. Come; another sup of the strong beer. There's plenty yet in the stone bottle. It's bound to hold a gallon. Well, 'twas a pretty fight, wasn't it, young gentlemen? and worth coming all the way from London to see. That's my opinion on't. A main pretty fight; and our man won. I be as pleased as pleased. Not for the trifle of money I'd put on young Jack. That says nothing. But for the honour of the county. I'll go bail those Portsmouth chaps will look down their noses when they come to hear on't. They made sure the Mudlark was going to have it all's own way. But

young Jack put it well into un. Gave un a main hiding. That's what I call it. Gipsy Joe won't scarce be able to see out of's head for a vortnight or more. Well done, young Jack! I always thought un a sprack young fellow. Not that he was e'er a morsel of use on my farm. Never did, not to say, a stroke of work. But he knows how to use his fists anyways. And he won the fight!"

The wind blew sharply from the east as we drove homeward. The farmer was in high spirits, and talked incessantly. It was clear that the great combat in Chingley Bottom had supplied him with a topic of conversation that would last him for a long time to come. I felt sure that after it had seemed to every one else perfectly threadbare, exhausted, and done with, Mr. Jobling would still now and then reproduce it, and find it fresh, and new, and full of interest. Tony said little. He was very tired, I think, and shivered much from the coldness of the wind, or from nervous reaction after so much excitement.

"Well, and who won?" asked my uncle as we re-entered the farm-house.

"Our side!"

He laughed and waved his newspaper in the air. My mother was very glad to see us safe home again.

The fight was nothing to her; but for my uncle's entertainment—and he was certainly interested in the matter—we supplied him with a detailed account of our adventures, including our meeting with old Hickley, whom he well remembered, though, he said, he had not seen him for some years.

Tony withdrew early that night I remember. He was quite worn out. I found my mother noting compassionately his jaded looks.

“Duke,” she said, “there can be no need for your friend's going back with you.”

My holiday was coming to an end. Already I had been making preparations for my return to town.

“He is far from well. He wants more rest and fresh air. He is happy here, I think; and I'm sure we will do all we may to make him happy, and to take care of him. Why should he not stay; for a while at any rate?”

I knew of no reason why. Indeed, I thought, with my mother, that it would be better for him to stay until he gained in strength and health. I was well assured he could not be left in tenderer or more heedful hands. There was nothing calling for his return to town very immediately. He had no engagements to fulfil. Only, as I stated, I had

hopes of securing him work in the studio of Sir George Nightingale.

"Ah! You have seen Sir George Nightingale?" She spoke with some eagerness. "I remember now. You mentioned it in one of your letters; and he—Sir George, I mean—received you well, Duke; he was kind to you."

"He was very kind. He acknowledged me at once as a relation. Am I nearly related to him?"

"He is only a distant relation of yours—very distant," my uncle interposed rather sharply. He had been reading the newspaper, holding it away from him, at arm's length, with a candle between it and him. His sight was weakening, and he read with difficulty; but he was still a devoted student of our county journal. He especially liked, I think, to con over the quotations of the prices in Steepleborough corn market; though, as he punctually attended there every Wednesday, he must have possessed quite as much information on the subject as the editor of the paper. Still it was somehow pleasant to him to have his knowledge confirmed by the press. It was almost like seeing himself in print.

"He was very kind to me in any case," I said.

"I hope you did not urge any claims to his

kindness?" He laid down his newspaper, put the candle from him, and straightened himself in his chair as he spoke.

"No, certainly; I made no claim upon him."

"That's well. These great men, you see—and Sir George, I suppose, is held to be a great man, not merely by himself, but by others"—he stopped to take snuff, and then abandoned the subject of his discourse almost as though he had forgotten what he intended to say. His tone had been unusually and unreasonably acrid, I thought.

"Lord Overbury was at the fight," I mentioned, after a pause, changing the subject.

"I did not know he was in England," my uncle said, quietly. "Indeed, I heard at market, quite lately, that his embarrassments would prevent his ever reappearing in this country. He has not been seen about here for many a long day. He has not been missed, however. I wonder the estate has not been sold. It's as much as his trustees can do, I understand, to pay the interest on the mortgages. So he was at the fight, was he? He was always a great patron of the ring."

Tony was disinclined to allow me to return to London alone. It was unfair, he said, that I should go back to work while he idled and enjoyed himself

in the country. He yielded at length, however, rather to my mother's entreaties than to mine. She had acquired considerable influence over him, though she exercised it in the gentlest and tenderest way.

"You know, Duke, I never saw my own mother, to remember her," he said one day. "But it seems to me she must have been something like yours. It's wonderful what a sort of home-like feeling this house has for me. I've only known it really for a very few weeks, and yet I seem to have lived here all my life. It's due, of course, to your mother's exceeding kindness to me. And your uncle too, I mustn't leave him out. He's wonderfully good to me, and doesn't mind in the least the rubbish and nonsense I sometimes talk. Really, you know, all things considered, I'm a most fortunate young fellow. I've done nothing to deserve the kindness people—all sorts of people—show me. I won't speak of you, old boy, because if I once begin I shan't know when to leave off. I wish very much I could go back to London with you, and recommence hard work again. There are so many things I intend to do; to assist Sir George, and revolutionise portrait-painting, among others. But, as you say, being here, perhaps it's as well to stay, and grow quite well and strong again. I shall soon

shake off this ridiculous feeling of illness, and rejoin you in London."

Poor Tony! It was Death's secure grasp he was talking so lightly of shaking off. He knew nothing of the peril he was in. Nor, indeed, did I at that time. He was so young, and to me, then, death seemed only the fate of the old; an event so remote from youthful years as to be not worth taking into account. At twenty or so life seems to have no limits. My mother's eyes, I think, had been more far-seeing and observant; or she, perhaps, rather feared than knew that my poor boyfriend was seriously threatened. She said no word upon the subject, yet I noted a watchful foreboding in her eyes when they rested upon Tony. It may be that, almost unconsciously, she discerned upon his face signs as fatally significant of coming doom as the "blaze" of white paint to be seen upon certain forest trees, marking them out as the early prey of the woodman's axe.

I have stated that he knew nothing of his peril, and generally this seemed so. He talked in full faith of his certain and speedy recovery. Yet something he once said suggested that he entertained some vague misgiving on the subject.

He was sketching from memory the scene in

Chingley Bottom, and was loud in his admiration of the graceful proportions, the skill, and strength of our champion, the Baker.

"Yet it seemed to me throughout," he said, "that his life was in extreme danger. It was quite true what the country folks about us said. One blow from Gipsy Joe's brawny fist would surely have killed him. The blow was never fairly struck—Jack was far too clever and nimble to give the Mudlark the chance. But if it had been! There would have been an end for ever of poor Jack. And really, you know, we're all nearer death than we ever suppose, even though we don't stand up in the ring against such muscular monsters as Gipsy Joe."

It was a day or two after this, and the eve of my return to London.

"Duke, do you think you're lawyer enough to draw a short will?" he inquired.

I said I thought I was, provided it was of a simple nature, as well as short.

"Oh, it's simple enough. Because I'm to be the testator, and I've little enough to dispose of, as you know. Still there's just this: the money in my uncle's hands, that belongs to me. It seems absurd, no doubt, my making a will. It looks pretentious

almost, as though I affected to be possessed of enormous wealth. I always picture to myself a testator as an old chap sitting up in bed in a night-cap, and, at the point of death, making testamentary arrangements that will bitterly annoy all his kinsfolk. Still I don't know that even at my age it isn't a good and prudent sort of thing to do, rather than not. What do you say?"

I said that it was certainly a good and prudent thing to do.

"A line will be almost enough, I should think. 'I give everything to poor Rachel, absolutely.' Isn't that the right word? I'm only a year or two older than she is; but she may survive me. Who knows? Women are generally longer lived than men, I believe. They lead such quiet, sober, steady lives, you see. The poor child, though, has not had a very happy time of it hitherto, I fear. I give her everything, and appoint her sole executrix. That's rightly put, isn't it? Of course there ought to be a thumping legacy for you, old fellow; and something——"

I would not allow him to say a word more on that head. I was vexed at his thinking for a moment of a bequest to me to the prejudice of his

cousin. I urged him almost peremptorily to leave everything to her.

"You grow quite warm about it, Duke," he said, laughingly. "But I dare say you're right; and I'm glad to see you've such a firm, stern, lawyer-like way of stating your opinion. It's very bracing to a weak client. Yes, everything to poor dear Rachel; let it be so. I owe her very much. She's been quite a sister to me. At least, I'm sure if I had ever been blessed with a sister—I never have been, as you know—she would have been to me just what Rachel is. She's a dear, good little soul, thinking of everybody before herself; and what a dull secluded life she's been leading in that dreary old house in Golden-square! She's been shut up like a fresh lily in a musty law book, perfuming its stupid pages, but hidden, crushed, sacrificed. So it always seemed to me. She looked very pale and sad, I thought, the last time I saw her. But she wouldn't own to being unhappy, except about her father." He was silent for some moments, musing over Rachel, but very calmly, I judged—not as a lover would. "Yes," he resumed presently, "everything I have must go to her, of course."

Still he did not regard the will very seriously; it was in his eyes a sort of "merry bond."

I made a rough draft, and then a fair copy of it. I was surprised at my own skill. The document had a due legal and formal flavour; and there was no question but that it completely carried out the testator's intentions, and was thoroughly valid. It was executed with all proper ceremonies. I was careful that my mother and my uncle should add their names to mine as witnesses. They were gratified, I think, at the evidence afforded of my professional aptitude; and they viewed the matter with becoming gravity. As they put on their glasses and affixed their signatures to the paper their manner had something about it quite solemn even to sadness. Tony restrained all inclination towards jesting; his face wore a thoughtful and impressed look as he sealed up and delivered the will to my mother, and asked her if she would kindly take charge of it for him. She pressed his hand very tenderly, I noticed, as she received the little packet from him. And presently she turned away, so that he might not see, perhaps, that there were tears in her eyes.

"It's odd, old fellow," he said to me afterwards, with a sigh, "that making one's will should seem so like signing one's death-warrant. But it is so. I feel it so; and they, I could see, did so too. And

you feel it also, I'm pretty sure. Yet it's a mere form. What superstitious creatures we all are! A will made by one of my age. You know it's really more of a joke than anything else." But he sighed as he spoke. "Good-night, my dear Duke, and many thanks, once more, for all you've done for me. I shall soon rejoin you in London."

The next morning I returned to town, and resumed tenancy of my lodgings in Featherstone-buildings.

CHAPTER XXII.

RELEASE.

I WAS ringing Mr. Monck's office bell. But the door did not spring open with the old prompt magic. I rang again and again.

Suddenly I perceived Vickery inspecting me through the cloudy panes of one of the ground-floor windows. He nodded, quickly withdrew, and after a little pause, during which I heard him unfasten the chain and bolts of the door, I was admitted.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Nightingale; pray come in. I hardly expected you so soon."

"Are you ill, Vickery?" He was very pale, and his manner was certainly agitated.

"Thank you, Mr. Nightingale. No. I'm pretty well. I'm in my usual health, I may say."

"And Mr. Monck? You have good news to tell me of him, I trust?"

He did not answer for a minute or so. He was hesitating, I think, whether he should or not reproduce the old formula I knew so well, to the effect that Mr. Monck was in, but particularly engaged, and was not likely to be disengaged very immediately. He decided, however, that, so far as I was concerned, this reply had ceased to be of any avail.

"No, Mr. Nightingale, I am pained to say that I have no good news to tell you of Mr. Monck. He is very ill, indeed."

"And Miss Rachel?"

"Need you ask? Poor Miss Rachel!" And he turned from me.

The office looked very bare and desolate. The boy had departed, it seemed. I never saw him again. All necessity for his further services had ceased. No business was going on. Old Vickery had resumed his seat at his desk, but there was now no litter of papers before him. His inkstand was empty. He was without pens. He sat still upon his high stool, leaning forward upon his elbows, with both hands pressed upon his forehead, lost in thought. He looked ill, and very old, and intensely sad.

I unlocked my desk, and peered into it, by way

of doing something. It contained little beyond scraps of paper, old letters, and a dusty crumpled coat I had been wont to assume in office hours. In my absence the moths, I found, had made very free with the garment.

The office bell rang. The wires which communicated with the street door, enabling any one to open it without quitting the office, had snapped, I perceived, worn out with age and rust.

"Never mind," said Vickery, with a depressed air; "it's nothing, I dare say. They'll ring till they're tired, and then they'll go away. If it's papers, they can slip them under the door. There's no need to see who it is, Mr. Nightingale." The sound of his own voice, or the exercise of speech, seemed to cheer him a little. "You see, Mr. Nightingale," he went on, in something more like his usual tone, "it's vacation time now, the heart of the vacation, I may say, and there's but little doing in the law. All the offices are closed. Counsel are not at chambers. Chancery-lane is quite deserted. It's almost a pity you hurried back from the country; that is, of course, if you were happy there. I never cared for holidays myself, though I know that many people do. Your absence did not inconvenience us. You have not been wanted.

Though I'm glad, of course, to see you again, looking so well, too—quite stout and sunburnt, I declare. The change has done you good. Change does some people good. But for my part, I never found it agree with me particularly. It's a good thing, I always think, when one has quite made up one's mind as to what agrees with one and what doesn't. I've done that, now. It was time, perhaps, at my age. And London—by which I mean this office, my seat here, the law—suits me better than anything else, I find."

After this he relapsed into silence. I wrote letters to my mother and to Tony announcing my safe arrival in town, and setting forth various matters that I thought might interest and amuse them. Somehow we always have so much more to write about immediately after quitting our friends than when we have been a long time absent from them, however important may be the events that have happened in the interval. But letters depend for their existence mainly upon small and intimate matters, and to these prolonged separation is almost fatal.

Vickery was now stirring himself to make a show of business. He had spread various papers before him, stuck a pen behind his ear, and he held

in his mouth a piece of red tape, which had been wound round certain of the documents he affected to be engaged upon.

"We don't work so hard in the vacation, Mr. Nightingale; we take things rather more easily then than at other times. You needn't trouble yourself to return to your desk after dinner, for instance, Mr. Nightingale; not just at present, at any rate. By-and-by, of course, it will be different, and we shall have our hands full, very full, indeed, I've no doubt. And in an office like this there's always a something going on, however slack we may seem to be. Perhaps when you have a spare moment you'll just check the additions of this bill of costs, and see if you make my totals correct. But there's no hurry, no sort of hurry, about it. They're Chancery costs. Perhaps you may find it instructive to cast your eye over the different items, and see how we deal with such matters."

He placed a pile of papers upon my desk and quitted the room. He had so expressly stated that hurry was unnecessary, that I did not venture to disturb them, or even to look at them. Presently he returned.

"Miss Rachel would like to see you, Mr. Nightingale, for a few minutes."

I found her in the large dingy front room on the first floor. She advanced to meet me with her small soft hand outstretched.

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. Nightingale. And yet I'm sorry, too, that you should come back to so sad a house as this."

"Mr. Monck——"

"He is very, very ill. He is in extreme danger. I may now scarcely hope for his recovery. And yet I do hope still." But the sigh with which she said this was despair itself, I thought. That she was suffering acutely was very apparent. Her eyes seemed dimmed and weary with incessant watching; the lids drooping tremblingly over them, as though longing to close and veil them in sleep; while yet in the eager, hungry, almost gaunt expression of her face there was something that forbade the thought of rest. She was the prey of intense anxiety and consuming dread; there was a quick nervous pulsation in her wan cheeks; her voice sounded faint and parched. I was greatly distressed to see her thus. I thought of what Tony had said of her: that she was a lily shut up in a law book. The poor flower was now crushed and broken indeed. I murmured vague expressions of sympathy and comfort. Probably my words were not very intelligible; but she

could see that I meant kindly. And something of a faint plaintive smile trembled for a moment about her pale lips.

"You found your friends well, I trust, Mr. Nightingale, and left them so? How pleased they must have been to have you with them again. And—my cousin—Tony?"

I explained how it was that Tony had not returned with me.

"He is ill—is that what you mean?" she asked, with a look of alarm.

"Not really ill. Nothing serious, I am sure. But he is not very strong. A little rest in the country air will surely restore him. And there is nothing to require his presence in town."

"Nothing—no one," she murmured faintly. "He did well to stay."

"He had been working too hard before he left. He deserved a holiday. And he will be well cared for, be sure of that, Miss Monck. My mother treats him as her own son."

"She's a good kind woman, your mother, I'm sure of that, though I have never seen her."

"She has grown quite fond of him. I left them the closest friends. Indeed, Tony has endeared himself to us all."

"I can well understand that," she said, in a musing, almost unconscious way. Presently there was something of suspicion and mistrust in her glance as she demanded, "You are certain that there is no danger."

"I may say so, indeed. I feel assured that there is no danger."

"You are not hiding anything from me? If so, believe me, you are doing wrong. You may think it kind to keep the truth from me. But it is cruel kindness. I want the simple truth. I can endure. I am no coward when I really know my danger. I have learnt—I have taught myself—to be brave, and to suffer. And I have suffered—I am suffering still, Heaven knows! Forgive me. I am talking wildly. My head aches terribly to-day, and I hardly know what I say. But I have been unjust to you. I see that. You would not deceive me in this matter. But—he sent no message by you?"

"No. But he will write to you, of course."

"He will write? When? Why has he not written? You have not hindered his writing? There was nothing to hinder his writing? Forgive me again, Mr. Nightingale. I don't know what possesses me to talk in this mad way. But I have been so longing to hear from Tony. I have laid quite a

foolish stress upon having a letter from him. My life is so sad and secluded—I'm not complaining, but it is so—that the merest trifle makes a great difference to me. If you had brought me but a few lines in Tony's writing, they would have cheered me so much. But you couldn't know that, and he, poor boy, never gave it a thought, I daresay. There was so much about him that was fresh and new to interest and occupy him; he didn't feel his time to be quite at his own disposal. No wonder he didn't think of me. Why should I trouble his thoughts? I'm but a sad subject; he would only have grown sad, perhaps, thinking of me. And I wouldn't have him sad."

"But he did think of you, Miss Monck, and speak of you often, and always kindly and affectionately."

"He was always kind and affectionate. He spoke of me—and he said—something you may tell me, perhaps, Mr. Nightingale, if it be only a word of what he really said?"

I answered with some hesitation:

"He mentioned how much he owed to you; how kind you had always been to him. That you had been to him as a sister, always."

"Yes; I have been his sister. He has been

to me as a brother. Thank you, Mr. Nightingale."

She spoke in a faint voice, sighing, with her eyes gazing at some far distant object, as it seemed to me. Mechanically she gave me her hand again; it was feverish and trembling; I pressed it lightly and quitted her.

The next day I was again at the office. I sat at my desk, now toying with the additions of the bills of costs Vickery had handed me, and now engaged upon a series of fancy sketches in pen and ink. I remember, too, making many experiments as to the most advisable method of signing my name, and the especial signature I should decide upon adopting, unchangeably, thenceforward. I devoted much time to this inquiry. "Marmaduke Nightingale" in large, bold, black letters had its merits undoubted; but there was a good deal to be said for a fluent "M. Nightingale," with a dashing flourish beneath. If I ever became famous, I judged that posterity would know me familiarly and playfully as "Duke Nightingale;" but I could hardly as yet assume that abbreviated form for my established signature.

Vickery was very silent. He did not affect to occupy himself with any office work. Now he sat

mute and motionless, leaning his head upon his hands, staring vacantly at his inkstand, holding between thumb and finger a pinch of snuff he had forgotten to apply to his nose. Now he was seized with a restless fit, and shuffled hither and thither in and out of the room, muttering to himself, rapping his tin snuff-box, waving his yellow handkerchief, and taking snuff with nervous noisiness and frequency. He seemed to be waiting for something or somebody, and to have grown almost crazy from the cruel overtaxing of his patience. Then he would relapse again into stillness, and rest upon his high stool in a state of abstraction—almost of torpor.

The office door was ajar. All was very quiet. The ticking of the clock seemed unusually loud, and I could plainly hear the footsteps of passers-by upon the pavement of the street without.

What was that? A cry, or rather a feeble, painful moan from one of the upper rooms of the house. Vickery leapt from his high stool.

"Don't stir," he cried to me, almost fiercely.

He hurried from the office, and with utmost haste mounted the stairs. I heard the sound of a door closing behind him.

I sat alone for an hour as I thought. It was in

truth but a very few minutes. Would he never come back? I asked myself. I was strangely excited. I felt that my eyes and mouth were wide open.

Vickery was descending the stairs again.

"What has happened?"

"The worst, I fear." He was as white as a sheet, and trembling all over. He gasped for breath. "The doctor—I am going for him." In his agitation and bewilderment he could not find his hat, though, as I observed afterwards, it hung upon the peg it had occupied for years. He took up my hat, without knowing that it was mine, or perceiving that it did not fit him in the least. It was strange that, even at such a moment, a thought of the ludicrous figure he unconsciously presented darted across my mind.

He turned on the threshold, and in a husky, passionate voice, said:

"You will not quit the office? You will not go upstairs? Promise me you will not, as you are a gentleman!"

"I promise. I will not quit the room until I am specially asked to do so."

He darted off without closing the street door after him.

I could not sit still. I paced up and down the office, stopping now and then to listen. Was that Vickery returning? No, not yet. It was only some one passing in the street. Stop; was that the moaning cry from upstairs again? It was fancy wrought upon by memory and apprehension. All was very still. Mr. Monck was dying. That was only too plain.

Vickery returned, bringing with him a young man, whom I understood to be a doctor's assistant. The doctor, it appeared, was absent at the moment, and his services could not be secured.

Vickery and the assistant, whose name I afterwards ascertained to be Pitfield, mounted the stairs together. The one, I noted, was all anxiety and eagerness, was pale and very tremulous; the other was sufficiently cool and collected. He was a young man, but he had acquired something of the deliberate and self-contained manner of his profession. He found time to run his fingers through his hair, and adjust his side-locks, before he went up-stairs.

I waited, listening, at the office door.

"He has never moved!" Rachel was the speaker. Her voice sounded harsh and shrill, almost as though, in the intensity of her fear and suffering, it was some relief to her to cry aloud.

A pause. There was some movement in the room up-stairs—the back drawing-room as I judged.

“Take her away.”

It was Mr. Pitfield’s voice. Then came a most heart-broken wail, followed by quick sobbings and half-muffled moans of acute anguish. Poor Rachel!

I found myself trembling with excitement; my hair was wet upon my forehead; my heart throbbed with painful violence.

They were coming downstairs again; Vickery and Mr. Pitfield.

“I could do nothing,” the latter was saying, in a calm tone. “There was really nothing to be done—all must have been over before you came to me. But even if I had been here sooner it would have made no difference. Nothing could have saved him. He has been a doomed man for a long time past. I have often talked over the case with Viner.” Pitfield was Mr. Viner’s assistant. “Viner made no secret of his opinion. He was surprised the patient had survived so long. Of his recovery Viner never entertained any hope whatever. It couldn’t be, you know. There was a reasonably strong constitution to work upon; but then softening of the brain of long standing! The plain truth is, as you must very well know, that

the poor man has been stark mad this many a long day."

"I knew it. She did not," said Vickery, with touching simplicity. "At least I tried to hide it from her as well as I could. Perhaps she knew it too—and we were trying to hide it from each other. Poor Miss Rachel!"

"Yes, it's sad. But still, if it's looked at in the right light, it should, perhaps, rather be called a happy release."

"It's so easy to say—a happy release!"

"There was no hope."

"Perhaps not. But he lived. She did not ask for more than that. It did not seem so much to ask. But he's taken from her now. Poor Miss Rachel!"

I observed that now all was over, Vickery had resumed something of his usual composure of manner, although there were still tears in his eyes, and his expression was very sad. He had entered the office with Mr. Pitfield, and as he stood near his desk, old habits reasserted their rule over him. He began collecting scattered papers, and winding red tape round them. And took snuff again, proffering his tin box to Mr. Pitfield, who availed himself of the opportunity, and sneezed very freely afterwards.

"You'll want a certificate of the cause of death, I suppose?" said Mr. Pitfield. "There will be no difficulty whatever about that. I can give it to you. I'm qualified, you know. I've passed the Hall, though just now it's convenient to me to be with Viner as his assistant. 'Softening of the brain of long standing.' That will be enough, I should say. Although, if need be, we might add something about attacks of acute dementia. Let me see; Mr. Monck, I suppose, was about——"

"Fifty-six last June."

"Not more than that? I thought him years older. Viner will be sorry to hear of his death. Good morning."

"Mr. Nightingale," Vickery said to me presently, rousing himself from a reverie, and suddenly discovering, as it were, the fact of my existence, "Mr. Monck is dead. There will be no occasion for you to come here any more."

So I was released from my articles; without ever having seen, dead or alive, the solicitor to whom I had been bound!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COMIC MUSE.

My career as a student of law had terminated. I had for some time been thoroughly conscious that my profession possessed no charms for me; that, in truth, I could never become a lawyer. Yet I had been unprepared for the sudden death of Mr. Monck. I am surprised now, when I think how little I had contemplated that sad event. I knew that he had been very ill; I had gathered that but faint hopes could be entertained of his ultimate recovery. Still it had seemed to me that he might possibly long survive, although in an invalid state, tenderly nursed by his fond Rachel; with his faithful old clerk, his efficient substitute in the office; while I remained at my desk articulated to the employer I was never to see. In such wise, I thought, things might go on for a long while as they had been going on.

But now all was changed. I might finally close my law books, thrust from me my law-papers. I did this with a sigh, however. Not on their account; but I felt that, quitting them, I was quitting Rachel too. When the door of the house in Golden-square closed against me for the last time, it would separate me from Rachel—perhaps for ever. I should go on my way and see her no more. Our lives would be sundered; we might remain thenceforward completely ignorant of each other's fate. To her this might be little enough. To me it was very much. Altogether I was unspeakably depressed. And so I lingered in the office; regarding it almost fondly, now the time had really come for quitting it. Thoughts of Rachel rendered it precious in my eyes. And it was most painful to me to know that she must be suffering acutely, plunged into the deepest distress of her life, probably, the while I could do nothing in any way to lighten the heavy burden she was doomed to bear. At such a time, of course, there was almost profanation in the thought of my approaching her. In her all-absorbing and profound grief she had probably forgotten my very name. I was nothing to her. The articled clerk of her dead father. Less than nothing. How I wished that

Tony had come up to London with me! He was her cousin, and she loved him. She would not feel so utterly helpless and abandoned to despair, if he were by her side.

Vickery, treading very softly, went in and out of the office. I could hear him close the shutters of all the front windows. He bandaged the door-knocker so as to muffle its sound. He was very silent, but perfectly composed. He seemed relieved by the thought that now he knew the worst; that fate could have no unkindlier blow in store for him. His cat-like method of moving to and fro stood him in good stead. Every now and then he went stealthily up-stairs.

"Miss Rachel?" I inquired of him in a low whisper.

"She is a little better, I hope. I have persuaded her to lie down and try and sleep. I will do all that can be done for her, do not fear, Mr. Nightingale. I shall not quit the house while I think she may possibly want help from me. She has known me all her life, and trusts me, as her father did, poor man. There is no fear that I shall fail to do my duty towards her. But you, Mr. Nightingale——"

"I am going directly." And then I said some-

thing about Mr. Monck's representatives, to whom, under the terms of my articles, I believed myself still legally bound. Vickery hesitated for some moments.

"The late Mr. Monck has left no will. I am in a position to speak confidently on that subject. Indeed, as a rule, lawyers do not leave wills; that is my experience. They make so many wills for other people, perhaps they learn to distrust wills. And as to administration," he checked himself. Presently he resumed: "What I say is in confidence, you will understand, Mr. Nightingale. You already possess some information in the matter. I know that I may trust you further. My opinion, as I am at present advised, is, that Miss Rachel should not administer. There are too many liabilities. But in such cases, the liabilities of a deceased person are, if I may so express myself, 'the look out' of the creditors of that person."

I told him that I should certainly call on the morrow to inquire as to the health of Miss Rachel.

"You will not see her," he said, abruptly.

I stated that I did not expect to see her, that I did not seek to intrude upon her in her deep affliction; but that I should be anxious to know how she fared under her severe trial, and that I should

be thankful for any information on that head he might be able to afford me.

"Well, be it so. I shall be here," he said. And he cautioned me to knock and ring very gently.

I saw him on the morrow, and, indeed each day, until the funeral took place.

Rachel, I learnt, was very weak, was suffering gravely. But she had been able to sleep, and was growing more and more composed. It was a hopeful account altogether. I was informed, too, that, by her express desire, Tony was not to be summoned from the country to attend the funeral of his uncle. I recognised in this Rachel's enduring spirit of self-sacrifice. I knew that she must have yearned in truth for his presence. But she had thought of his ailing health, and had forborne to summon him from the Down Farm. Indeed, she forgot nothing. She sent a message of thanks to me for a little note, expressive of my sincerest sympathy, I had ventured to write to her (I accomplished the task with exceeding difficulty, I remember—it was my first letter to her), and also for some few flowers I had left for her in Vickery's charge. I had thought that their fragrance and beauty might soothe, perhaps, her stricken heart

and aching brain. I was very glad afterwards that I had done this. For on the morning of the funeral—which took place in the churchyard of St. Anne's, Soho, where, it seemed, the Monck family had long possessed a vault—I noticed that Rachel, looking deadly pale in her deep mourning, strewed these flowers upon the coffin of her father. Vickery stood beside her, with a third person, whom I decided to be Mr. Viner, the doctor; there was no other mourner. It was a very simple ceremony. But one mourning-coach followed the hearse. An autumn mist floated about the churchyard, screening the steeple, from which the bell was tolling solemnly. The rattle of wheels in the adjoining thoroughfares, the shouts of street-traders, the cries of children playing in the streets close by, could plainly be heard. Still the sound of the earth pattering upon the lid of the lowered coffin was audible enough to me standing somewhat aloof from the little group of mourners, yet certainly sharing in their sorrow for the departed. The clergyman's voice ceased. I could see him close his book, and prepare to move away from the grave. Then came a sad and solemn pause. At length, her eyes to the last turned to the spot where poor Mr. Monck's remains were inhumed, Rachel

suffered herself to be led away by Vickery. For one moment, her fortitude yielded—she stood still, hid her face upon the old man's shoulder, and sobbed bitterly. He spoke no word, I think, but he gently caressed her hand, and then drew her again towards the mourning-coach. So they passed out of my sight, and I slowly wended my way to my lodgings, feeling more miserable than I had ever felt before in all my life.

For some hours I could do nothing but sit musing in my uneasy arm-chair, sorrowing over Rachel's sorrows, and reflecting upon my own unsatisfactory position. My new experiences had greatly impressed me. I began to consider, almost for the first time, the seriousness of life, the awfulness of death. I discovered, however, that time possessed, in a remarkable degree, the power of allaying and abating grief. Presently I perceived, with surprise and some dissatisfaction, that I was not, in truth, nearly so depressed as I had believed myself to be.

A few days after the funeral I called in Golden-square. But though I rang the office bell, and plied the door knocker with some force, I could make no one hear. A servant from a neighbouring area informed me that Mr. Monck's house was now

empty, and that it was in vain I sought admission.

It was strange. What had become of Rachel? What of Vickery? But I felt sure that I should hear from him shortly. He was acquainted with my address, and would certainly write to me. Still, that he should quit Golden-square so abruptly was curious enough. Of Rachel I was satisfied I should have tidings, from time to time, through Tony. He would, without doubt, be kept informed of her movements.

Then I went on to Harley-street to visit Sir George.

Mole met me in the doorway, and welcomed my return with exuberant heartiness.

"But you look sad," he remarked, "and you wear crape upon your hat. What has happened? Why these Hamlet airs?"

I informed him of the death of Mr. Monck.

"That all? Come, cheer up. He won't be missed. It's only one lawyer the less; hardly matter for sorrow. There's plenty more lawyers alive you know."

I begged him not to speak of the subject in that light way. Then we went on to discuss other topics.

Sir George was absent ; in Paris, Mole thought, but was not sure. His return to town was expected almost immediately. He had been away for a few days only. He had not taken Propert with him ; he rarely availed himself of the services of a valet. Propert was enjoying a brief holiday. He had gone down to Stoke, in Staffordshire, to visit his father.

"Keeps the Seven Bells there," Mole stated ; "a highly respectable man, who draws a very decent glass of ale. I've seen *him*, and I've tasted *it*, and I've no fault to find with either. You remember what Boniface says in the play ? 'The best ale in Staffordshire ; smooth as oil, sweet as milk, clear as amber, and strong as brandy ; and will be just fourteen year old the fifth day of next March, old style !' A comfortable house the Seven Bells. Propert looks to inherit it, I fancy ; and he's saved in service a tidy little sum of his own, no doubt. But he's not the man to play 'mine host ;' he'll never be able to fill out the part. In my hands, now, the landlord of the Seven Bells would have every justice done him, and impress the audience very considerably."

I inquired if there was much going on in the studio.

"Not much," he said. "I'm at work rubbing

in a royal portrait or two, otherwise——” he stopped, glanced at me rather curiously, I thought, and then asked suddenly, “Did you come here quite by chance? Your visit had no special object, had it? No. I see it had not. Come up-stairs. Sir George is engaged upon a picture you haven’t seen. Wait one moment,” and he left me.

Presently, from the top of the stairs, he called to me to enter the studio.

A large canvas stood upon the easel, the light falling fully upon it.

“Unfinished, of course,” said Mole. “Only just sketched in in parts. The old properties, you see. The classic column and the crimson hangings in heavy folds. We can’t get on without them. A portrait with an element of fancy about it though. We call it ‘The Comic Muse.’ Miss Darlington in the character of Thalia.”

“Miss Darlington?”

“Yes. You don’t know the name, I dare say.”

The lady was represented, life size, emerging from crimson curtains, and descending a flight of marble steps. She carried a mask in one hand, in the other a shepherd’s crook decked with flowers. Her classic draperies did not fall low enough to conceal the slim symmetry of her sandalled feet.

A vaporous blue scarf, spangled with silver stars, floated about her. There were strings of pearls round her neck and wrists ; garlands and wreaths, roughly sketched, strewed the ground at her feet. She was of majestic figure, of lustrous complexion, with rich coils of auburn hair crested above her forehead, and falling in dark clouds about her white neck and shoulders. Her full cherry-red lips were of perfect form ; her hazel eyes gleamed brilliantly beneath her arched, clearly-marked brows.

Another moment, and I was starting back.

"What ! You *do* know Miss Darlington ?"

"Yes."

Then—it was like a dream !—musical laughter rang out, the rustling of silk was heard, there was a sense of perfume in the air, jewels glittered, laces fluttered, a screen was thrown down, a figure moved towards me, two white hands rested on my shoulders, two hazel eyes, aglow and dancing with saucy merriment, beamed upon mine. Thalia, warm, breathing, brimming over with life, and health, and spirits, stood before me !

"Duke ! You know me ?"

What a lovely luscious voice it was ! How each tone thrilled through to my heart !

"Rosetta !"

"The screen scene in the School for Scandal was never better done," cried Mole, laughing loudly, and tossing his arms aloft. "I congratulate you, Lady Teazle; I should say Miss Darlington, of the T. R. Haymarket, the 'new actress!'"

END OF VOL. II.



